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The VIVIAN'S

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THE VIVIANS



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*Mr. Hay died June 11, 1906, shortly
after he finished "The Vivians."*

THE VIVIANS

BY

EDWIN BARRETT HAY



NEW YORK: G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS,
110 NASSAU ST. (OPPOSITE CORNER).
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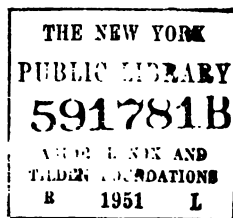
THE VIVIANS

BY
EDWIN BARRETT HAY



NEW YORK AND WASHINGTON
THE NEALE PUBLISHING COMPANY

1907



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THE VIVIANS



CHAPTER I

THE VIVIAN HALL SEMINARY

"Within, the master's desk is seen
Deep scarred by raps official."

Just before the opening of the morning session, May Manning, the personification of brightness and action, was busily occupied in entertaining the early arrivals among her classmates with a practical illustration of the history lesson, by impersonating "Molly Pitcher," engaged in her act of bravery at the battle of Monmouth, in June, 1776, after her husband, a young cannoneer, had been shot down beside his gun.

The better to affect the sense perception by the eyes as well as by the ears, she made use of all of the properties at hand. She placed the umbrella-holder on the master's desk to serve as the gun, and having wrapped the pointer for the blackboard with her handkerchief, she imitated the loading and ramming. While in the act, and amid the merriment occasioned among the pupils by this very realistic and interesting delineation, the principal entered. If he was displeased, he did not permit himself to show other than an amazed interest in the scene.

"May, what is the cause of the excitement and this extraordinary disarrangement of the furniture?"

Half in fear, half in confidence, May, shyly looking away from the teacher, replied:

"We are studying our history lesson, sir."

"What is that?"

"Why, the story of 'Molly Pitcher,' " and addressing Billy Green, a farmer's lad, who was holding the book, she said:

"Read it, Billy."

Delighted at the opportunity to oblige her, he read with the usual schoolboy whine:

" 'During the battle a young cannoneer was shot down and his piece was about to be taken by the enemy, when his wife, Molly Pitcher, seized the rammer, loaded the cannon, and fired with fatal effect.' "

May suited the action to the word and concluded the recital with a "bang!" which not only startled the teacher, but resounded throughout the schoolroom.

"There," she said, after the laughter and applause of the children at the incident had somewhat subsided, "I know there was never a more effective lesson than that, and" (looking up at the teacher with just a little more courage), "if you please, sir, I feel quite sure they won't forget it."

"I, too," affirmed the Professor, "will not forget it. You are indeed an actress, and I rather like your way of teaching. Now go on, Billy. Read further. What did General Washington do and say when he heard of it?"

Billy was so confused that he had lost his place in the excitement, and, looking up to the teacher, he responded: "I haven't got that far yet."

The teacher, not losing the context at all, continued:

"He made her a sergeant, and afterwards they called her 'Captain Molly.' "

Billy, recovering from his confusion at having lost the place, and being enthused by the interest of the

teacher in convincing him that May's conduct was not an infringement of any rules, could not resist giving vent to his feelings, and yelled:

"Three cheers for our Captain Molly!"

In this all of the pupils joined with a lusty goodwill.

The session began with the singing of the opening ode and the usual silent invocation. Then the principal, stepping to the blackboard, placed upon it several right and left curves and straight lines. As he did so, he commented upon the importance of the art of penmanship, this being the first exercise of the morning.

"I find, as a general thing," said he, "so few good writers that I conclude that it must be the inferior methods of instruction. Some teach the round handwriting with the slant to the right about fifty degrees; some, the vertical, straight up and down strokes; some, the angular system, which borders, as some style it, upon what is 'English, you know.' I never tolerate slang except when it is pardonable. That is merely a quotation.

"As far as writing goes, practical teaching is the better method. I tell you how to do, and show you how to do, by all of these curves and lines and strokes, slanting in various directions, and you do the rest. No matter how much I repeat to you 'right curve, left curve, straight line,' there is a photograph of each individual that will develop itself in every stroke, until each curve, each straight line and joining, becomes a part of yourselves, and takes on some of the character of your hands, so that the manner of your writing becomes as connected with you as your speaking, your running, walking, or any other mannerism.

"Your handwriting is your trade-mark. I study it until I know its every feature, as I do the features of your face, and when I see your writing upon the papers I do not have to look at the name to know whose it is, as immediately I can say 'that is May Manning's,' or 'that is Billy Green's,' or 'that is Bertha's.' To me it is a wonderful study, while to you it may be simply inexpressive lines forming letters and words. Some of you are born to it, and the work is pleasant. To some of you it is a mere matter of cultivation, and may be irksome. All I ask is that you do your best."

Then the pens were placed in correct position in the hands, and with the strict injunction that they rest easily in the fingers, all went to work upon the graceful exercise of the whole arm movement, each hand being kindly and patiently guided in the gentle struggle to acquire some perfection in the art.

While the class is thus quietly engaged, it will be a brief task to tell just who, what and where they are, to whom this introduction has, *sans ceremonie*, been made.

"Green-walled by the hills of Maryland" is nestled the modest little town of F——. In the center of it is the Hall of Justice (it being the county-seat), and in the town also are several institutions of learning, public and private, sectarian and non-sectarian. Among the latter is the Vivian Hall Seminary, endowed by a fund given by a philanthropic citizen, Mr. George Vivian. There are also two or three public halls, a few insurance companies, so cautious that they dislike to go beyond stone walls and mill dams in a security against fire; a number of not unpretentious banks, zealously watched over by boards of directors

who are liberal in making discounts when the patron as collateral furnishes two hundred per cent.

People of both schools, old and new, keep up a very gentle buzz of life, which knows no disturbance, except an occasional revival, a contest of squirting between rival fire-engines, annual elections, State conventions, and the County Fair. So that it may be said of the community with truth, that "it keeps on in the even tenor of its way." Clannish and scrupulously prudish, they cultivate long memories, so that the sins of the third and fourth generations are ever fresh, and a misdemeanor of the great-grandfather, very many times removed, is as much an inheritance as epileptic fits, or hereditary insanity.

On an extensive campus stands the Seminary. Paul Pennington, an unpedagogic demagogue, is the headmaster. His father before him had taught the fathers and mothers of the young folks of this generation, and he, having been a thorough scientist, was the recognized receptacle of wisdom; when by means of the microscope he exhibited to children some of the wonders in a drop of water, with all of its infusoria alive and kicking, he was looked upon as being supernatural, and his long glass was considered as an instrument of magic, so that Kellar, the great magician, did not astonish them more than did this old gentleman. His mental attainments and his microscope he handed down to his son, a tall, stately, handsome fellow, who, notwithstanding his humble position of being the teacher, had been looked upon with admiring eyes by many a mother having marriageable daughters. He also enjoyed the confidence of the entire community. His reputation of inherited attainment of an expert microscopist, had gone beyond the confines of the

township, and oftentimes he was called upon to make tests and experiments, and to render opinions, that gave him considerable notoriety. His examinations led him, as they had so often done for others, into a close study of chirography. With a microscope, having camera lucida attachments, he enlarged letters many degrees, and in a manner that reflected the outlines upon a surface in a position so that he could trace them. This he would do so well that measurements of his work proved that it compared with enlarged photography, which sometimes, by reason of the flexibility of paper, suffers in its exact proportions.

Having done so much for his own enlightenment and instruction in the art, he turned it to use by making examinations for the purpose of detecting spurious from genuine handwriting, until he was recognized as an expert in penmanship, and was called to testify in many court cases.

He was a bachelor—at least he was wedded only to his profession, and “*amo, amas, amat*” had been to him only utterances made in the course of the daily routine of his occupation.

He possessed, with his many attainments, the ability to impart ideas. Eminent scholars have been utter failures as instructors because of feeble methods of impressing their knowledge upon others.

Paul's presence brought sunshine into the school-room, and, therefore, in entering this morning session and finding May Manning enacting a scene, he entered into the spirit at once and finished the act by quoting the words of Washington in dubbing her “Captain Molly.”

When he referred to May's ability as an actress, he

was very sincere, knowing, as he did, that she inherited the talent from her mother, who was then supporting herself and this girl by her work on the stage, on which she had attained a reputation, in the legitimate drama, of considerable note, until the name of "Margery Manning" was indelibly impressed upon the theater-going public. Not only was she respected for her ability as an actress, but for her exemplary and upright life.

Coming to F——, with May, while the latter was an infant, she was the subject of much curiosity. She made her home with Cynthia Stokes, an aunt, who extended to her the protection of a relative.

Being refined, educated, and talented, circumspect in an especial degree, and of prepossessing appearance, Mrs. Manning soon won the respect and esteem of those whom she permitted to know her. As might have been expected in the case of a woman whose husband was neither dead nor accounted for, especially in a community where the right hand is ever busy endeavoring to find out what the left hand is doing, she was the subject of nods and queries, and over many a cup of tea, and other cups at the Inn and elsewhere, it had been questioned whether she ever had been wed at all.

The inquisitive postmaster was much struck by the handwriting on every envelope addressed to "Margery Manning." Ordinarily, it would have escaped attention, but the fact of the existence of a mystery concerning anything in that section, from the town-pump to the revolving of the weather vane upon the church spire, was sufficient to keep a self-appointed detective corps searching all the time. So when these letters would come in the summer, as that was the only time of Margery's sojourn in the town, she being engaged

in her professional work in the city during the remainder of the year, this important official, his wife and three old-maid daughters, and several of the neighbors who were confidential visitors, engaged in every method of investigation, except to break the seals and read the contents.

However, none grew wiser. The world may have contained the husband of Margery, the father of May, but he never materialized.

During May's early girlhood this was of no concern to her, though, naturally, in the progress of years, seeing the delight of her child companions in greeting the father's home-coming at eventide, she often wondered and no doubt heard her little heart asking: "Why does my papa never come?"

As each year went by the subject grew more embarrassing to the mother. For the curiosity of the world she cared little, but the natural questions of her loving little daughter smote her heart. She lived for her daughter, and determined to give her at least a good education, as the foundation of her future support and protection.

May possessed beauty of a rare type. Her face was charmingly modeled and her developing form gave promise of a superb maturity, but of her personal charms the young girl appeared to be wholly unconscious. In school or out of it she was the idol of her companions. She was not prudish, but discreet; not hoydenish, but refined; not forward, but self-possessed; not sensitive, but quick-tempered, and on the defensive in a moment to resent reflection upon her mother. Morally trained, the Church had no greater worker or a more enthusiastic assistant.

Women generally loved her, but some few of the

spinsters and the dyspeptic, the dissatisfied and the gossipers, were in the habit of saying unkind things in a sort of covert way.

To return to the classroom, we find Paul the schoolmaster with his attention fixed upon Billy Green, who was gripping the penholder as if he were a drowning man grasping at a straw, while his tongue kept time in and out of his mouth as he made an up or a down stroke.

"Billy," said the schoolmaster with a suddenness that startled the whole class, "give your tongue a rest there, you are not writing with that! You toil as vigorously at this simple exercise of writing as if you were ploughing a straight line in the field."

He might have proceeded further with his lecture on the peculiarity of school children, but he was interrupted by a rapping on the outer door. This summons was answered by a little fellow, who, child-like, was always watching for such opportunities to serve the teacher. With several cards in his hand he approached the desk and announced:

"Some people."

Paul read the names—"Mr. and Mrs. George Vivian," "Mr. George Vivian, Jr.," and "Mr. Charles Vivian." He received the visitors courteously and ushered them into the schoolroom, the pupils all rising respectfully in their places. While they were standing, Paul said: "Mr. and Mrs. Vivian, we are honored by your presence, and all join in bidding you welcome as our benefactors. And to you, young gentlemen, who have passed through the toils of college life and have been so long abroad delighting in the sights of foreign countries, we offer our most cordial greetings."

The Vivians were "the first people of the town," and occupied the palatial homestead, amid the great forest trees, known as "The Oaks." Fountains and statuary added picturesqueness to flower-adorned gardens, and the entire surroundings gave token of the presence of affluence and culture.

George Vivian possessed wealth by inheritance as well as by accumulation. Importation companies, in which he was largely interested, occupied his attention very much abroad, so that "The Oaks" had been deprived of his society for long periods at a time. Having settled in F——, he was fully in touch with its welfare, being especially generous to the Seminary which bore his name, and of which Paul Pennington was principal. His last munificent gift to this institution was a library of five thousand books, which was not confined alone to the use of the pupils, but was open to the public. A set of chimes was placed by Mr. Vivian in St. Clement's Church spire as a memorial to his deceased wife, who had died at the birth of Charles.

For several years he had been engrossed in business interests in foreign lands, leaving these boys, George and Charles, to be reared in educational institutions until they were graduated, each with high degree—one at Oxford and the other at Cambridge. In the meantime, with a view to enjoying the wealth which had come to him as the result of his various enterprises, a few years before this visit to the school he had surprised his neighbors and the boys by introducing a new wife to "The Oaks."

The new Mrs. Vivian was considerably younger than her husband. She did not possess all of the affinial nature and congeniality that could make a mar-

riage of this kind "a grand, sweet song," or fill the void in his life. To preside over a palatial home had been her principal ambition, and if her kind, forbearing, and generous husband ever expected sentiment, he was disappointed, as is the case often with a wife so much younger than her husband.

Mrs. Vivian had many opportunities to keep in mind the old saying "When there's love at home, there's beauty all around," in seconding her husband's benevolence cheerfully, and making for herself a name that could command respect. The boys respected her, as Mr. Vivian's wife, and gracefully accepted the situation. They sympathized with their father, whose generous and kindly nature deserved a better return in his own home. He was loved and esteemed in the community. If the "Mistress of The Oaks," as she was often called, commanded respect, she surely was never loved.

The two sons after graduating, spent several years abroad, and while Charles had taken a course in the theological schools of Oxford, George had obtained the practical education of studying people and places beyond the sea. Charles, having been ordained, was "called" by the Vestry of St. Clement's Parish, and had entered upon his duties as rector. Notwithstanding the fact that he had received the degree of Master of Laws, George permitted his attention to be turned towards dramatic art. His library contained the work of dramatists, orators, and jurists. This divergence of inclinations and literary tastes did not cause a divergence of affection between the brothers, though oftentimes they engaged in many heated discussions upon their favorite topics. Charles's vocation was very evident, and his future in the ministry assured,

while it was apparent that at no distant day either the stage or the forum would have a scholarly and capable exponent in George.

After Paul's welcome and reference to these young gentlemen, which pleased them very much, the father said:

"I thank you heartily, Mr. Pennington and my young friends, for your cordial greeting. I cannot take it to be for myself, as you do not know me. You cannot always tell a man by his looks. So I judge it is the library that you are greeting. One doesn't often read his own obituary, but I did desire before leaving this little town, with which I have been so long associated, to see a monument to myself erected by myself, so I donated a library filled with books of the day, and the enjoyment that you and my neighbors will get from it will be my happiness and reward."

This little address was warmly applauded by the children. Paul, always anxious to display his young charges to their best advantage, selected May Manning for a recitation, knowing that her ability in this line would do her justice and the school credit.

Blushingly she stepped out and made a modest curtsy. The ordinary audience of her fellow-pupils never abashed her. Mr. and Mrs. Vivian could have affected her only for a moment; but the presence of two young gentlemen, who had been graduated from famous universities, quite nonplussed her, and she could scarcely conceal her embarrassment. Her voice, with a soft sweetness about it, somewhat trembled as she began, but, recovering herself, she gave evidence of more than ordinary talent for elocution.

She recited "The Drummer's Bride," holding her

auditors rapt from the moment her resonant utterance sounded the approaching "Drum, Drum, Drum!" until the drummer "Beat his distant, dying beat," and in the aspirate she permitted the "Drum, Drum, Drum!" to die away until in the stillness of the spellbound surroundings her voice was entirely lost. The visitors joined in expressions of appreciation. She impressed them all, not only by her elocution, but by the modesty of her demeanor and ladylike bearing. As she passed the platform on which the guests were seated, she heard Mrs. Vivian's remark, *sotto voce*, to her husband:

"That is May Manning, the daughter of the actress."

"Ah, is it?" Mr. Vivian did not pursue the conversation further.

Mrs. Vivian persisted: "Yes, but her father is a myth."

"Indeed," said Mr. Vivian, "I cannot see what that has to do with the girl. She is remarkably talented, and her mother will find that her histrionic gown—I suppose I should say that in place of toga—will fall upon a most beautiful neck and likewise well-rounded shoulders."

Mrs. Vivian retorted, half in humor, half in meaning:

"I like the susceptibility of age."

These remarks did not escape the acute ears of May, and George observed that her eyes filled with tears. Something had happened, he knew not what, except that the one who had so delighted them had come to grief.

After a little further exchange of felicitations between Paul and the visitors, the Vivians prepared to

leave. As he was on his way out, George could not resist stopping at May's desk.

"Miss May, I was delighted with your recitation, and as I love the art I must hear you recite again," he said.

"Thank you, sir," she said.

"May I ask why your seeming pleasure was so soon changed to sadness?"

"Oh!" said May, "it is nothing, sir."

"There is something," persisted George, gently. "I watched your face all the time and saw that something had been said or done to cause you pain."

"Thank you, sir," she said, not raising her eyes. "I would rather not tell, if you will excuse me."

"It was something Mrs. Vivian said, I fear," he remarked, quietly.

"Yes, sir, it was, and I shall always hate her for it." As May said this she emphasized it by striking her hand upon the desk, and George, finding that they were attracting attention, said:

"Pray, forget it! It was very thoughtless, of course."

"Thank you, sir."

She bowed her head. He had gone, and the session was over, and

"The feet that creeping slow to school
Went storming out to play."

CHAPTER II

A CLOUD AND YOUTH'S SUNSHINE

DAVID BURTON, familiarly known as "Old Davy," for many years had been engaged in the sheriff's office of the county court in various capacities, but especially as the bailiff, whose duty had to do principally with the serving of subpoenas and various writs issuing from the office of the clerk of the court.

No one was better known or more respected than Davy. He had no enemies. His kindly nature made him a ray of sunshine, so that even the most unpleasant service, by virtue of his office, was brightened by a tenderness that softened a legal hardship into a quiet submission to the inevitable, without censuring the duty-bound servant for such a visitation.

His horse and himself had grown old together, and children who had often been made happy by a ride on horseback with him, along the roads and over the hills, had lived to see their children enjoying the same frolic and pastime. This man and his horse belonged to no single season. The summer suns, the winter snows, the falling leaves, and budding flowers all knew them, and it could almost be said of them, "Men may come and men may go, but *we* go on forever."

Attached to the saddle were the useful appendages known as saddle-bags, which for nearly a half century had been the receptacles of legal papers entrusted to his care, and upon which he had, in the fine engraving-

like script of the Italian hand which he wrote, and which had made him quite famous as a chirographist, inscribed "Not to be found," "Service acknowledged," "Service as within directed," with other like set expressions of duty performed required as evidence of service by that very requiring master—the Law. What a close association did those inanimate carriers on that saddle have with Davy! And what a varied and numerous relationship did they have with the people of that jurisdiction during the many years that Davy had faithfully served them! Limited the space and close the confines of those leather walls, yet how much of the majesty of the Law had prevailed there in the transmission of its power in the simple expression, "You are commanded, etc."

An honest, faithful, lovable, gentle old man, an agent of the State was this messenger which inexorable Law sent to the homes of the rich, to the hovels of poverty, to the workman at the forge, the farmer at the plow, to the people in every station and every pursuit, in season and out. For more than two score years Davy had made these visitations. In everything he did he was concise and precise. He was accurate in orthography, careful in punctuation, and his handwriting was marked for its beauty, roundness, and engraving-like finish. So beautiful was it that children from school would stop him by the roadside that they might obtain copy to follow in the school work.

Time, however, began its inroads upon Davy and likewise upon his handwriting, so that the smoothness of his work was somewhat disturbed by nervousness that tried to escape by the finger tips, especially when engaged in writing, and while not affecting the style of the work, which was quite his own, was perceptible

in the lines and execution. He was slowly retiring from active duty, and, having accumulated by prudence and frugality a reasonable fortune, he was not at all dependent upon his labors, but preferred an occupation which kept his mind busy and caused him to remain in close touch with his neighbors.

His experience made him a veritable lawyer on horseback, dispensing, in his rounds, legal opinions to the poor without the hope of fee or reward. As father confessor, he was the keeper of many a family skeleton.

His home, just on the edge of town, was ideal in beauty and comfort. Its foreground was ornamented with trees, flowers, and vines, while the background was a farm of several hundred acres under cultivation. The usual necessary appurtenances—a spacious barn, the cow-sheds and out-buildings—were present and in good repair; while under the spreading branches of a giant elm was a large spring, over a part of which stood the dairy house, where jars of milk were set daily and the cream accumulated to keep the churn in motion.

Reserving a place for himself, Davy had farmed out all the rest of the estate to John Hardgone, who not only cultivated the farm, but assumed, after a fashion, some of the care of Davy, and provided for the comfort of his home.

May Manning, being distantly related, was very near to the old man's heart, and, as he had watched her development from infancy, in all probability he knew more of her life than he ever told her, or, in fact, any one else, though frequent were his visits to Mrs. Stokes, his half-sister, to exchange confidential

talks about Margery, and to comment upon May's progress.

"What news of Margery, Cynthia?" he asked, approaching the garden in front of the little ivy-covered house, where Mrs. Stokes was culling flowers and waging war on the common pests of floriculture.

"She is playing in the 'Scarlet Letter,'" responded Mrs. Stokes, cutting the stem of a red rose. "She is too modest to write much about herself and her stage business, but I see by the papers that she is making an impression by her portrayal of 'Hester Prynne.'"

"'Hester Prynne,' eh? I judge she enters into it with much feeling," said Davy, slowly counting the leaves of a flower, as he unconsciously picked them, one by one, from a bud. "It must seem very natural to her—so true to life. Why, she'll make it a success, I know. With her dramatic power, and her experience, she'll live the part. It is the old story. A woman keeps a secret to shield a man. She bears the burden, pointing to the 'Scarlet Letter,' and he poses as a paragon of virtue."

"It is the way of the world," said Mrs. Stokes.

"Shameful, too, it is. It is only fiction, Cynthia, but it is the real truth anyhow, and it is just the way of the world. Oh, if I had my way!" He strode several times up and down the walk, as if his mildness were really giving way to excitement.

"Don't get excited, Davy. It's only a play, and you are too old to let the sentiment of it affect you."

"Yes, yes, I know that," said Davy, pausing. "It is not so much the play, it is the moral equation in real life that warms my blood until, were I the world, I could cry out against it."

"What do you mean by 'moral equation,' Davy? I think that is just a little too deep for me."

"I mean just this: The want of fairness and equity to the woman. No matter what the extenuation of circumstances may be. No hearing. An inquisition of narrow minds said that it is a woman—that's enough! Judgment without a trial. Brand her. Brand her with the mark—a Scarlet Letter—and let the man go free."

"It has always been so, Davy," quietly answered Mrs. Stokes, "and though women often are accused of being so uncharitable to their own sex, yet the instances of uncharitableness, even unto cruelty, as far as I know, Davy, have come from the men's side."

"I can't agree with you."

"You know something about the Scriptures, don't you, Davy?"

"Yes, of course I do."

"Isn't there a chapter somewhere that dramatically illustrates the Scarlet Letter of sacred history?"

Davy, with the switch he had broken from a bush, marked a letter "A" on the ground.

"Yes, Davy, and the Saviour did the same thing that you are doing now—marked with his finger in the sand—and, looking up, asked: 'Woman, where are thy accusers?' They were all men, and the cowards fled, didn't they, when the just Master suggested: 'Let him that is without sin cast the first stone'? Men put the letter on Hester, men compelled her to wear it, and, heartless as they were, they unflinchingly beheld her bear the burden of her shame and penalty of man's guilt. Honors are even, Davy, honors are even."

"I think somebody else is excited now," remarked Davy, regardless of the setback he had just received.

"I know it, and I can't help it either. I don't often get warmed up in a subject of the kind; but I'm a woman."

"Yes, and not a young one either," said Davy, with a smile of satisfaction at having made an unanswerable declaration.

"Age cuts no figure at such a time," quickly retorted Mrs. Stokes. "Between sixteen and a hundred, when a woman understands, she is going to defend her sex, and don't you forget it either, Davy. She is never too old to do that!"

"And I wish to add that I'm not too old to be her champion, and to denounce the conditions of social law which chides the woman when it should sympathize, and condemns when it should pardon. I'm a man, but I deplore the fact that the stronger the sex the lighter the penalty. Oh, here comes May from school! Not a word to her. I did not intend to get into this discussion."

If brightness could be heard, that of May's would have announced her coming. When she came up, her aunt, as if speeding her guest's parting, handed Davy a bunch of flowers.

"Take these with you as a reminder that though we reasoned from different premises our conclusions are the same," she said. "Your heart is all right, Davy."

"Thanks, Cynthia, I have always tried to keep it so. Ah, May, darling, I am so glad to see you. You have arrived just in time to see your aunt presenting a peace-offering after a war of words, and it looks as if I am retiring from the field as victor."

"I am quite sure, Davy, that you are too magnanimous to admit being a victor where a woman is your adversary," observed May.

"Ah, May, and also too gallant," remarked her aunt.

Davy took off his hat and blushing had to acknowledge the compliments with a simple "Thank you." He quickly changed the subject. "Well, May, how has the day gone with you?"

"Very happy, in a way—just a little cloud, though."

"Yes, and a little rain, too, eh?" he said, looking at her eyes. "Tell me what it is."

He had always been the repository of her childish griefs, and few she had, as well as her joys, of which there were many.

"I'll walk a way with you, Davy, and talk. Aunt, I'll return shortly."

They had gone only a short distance, but out of sight of the aunt among her flowers, when May stopped suddenly in front of Davy, took him by the shoulders, and turned him to face her. Then placing her pretty hands on his cheeks, she fixed her gaze on his, and startled him with the question:

"Davy, can you tell me who is my father?"

He was so startled that for several moments he was unable to answer. Then he said:

"No, May, I cannot."

"Did you ever know him?" she pleaded. "Tell me, tell me, please. Oh, Davy, tell me! Can't you tell me who he is? Where he is? What he is? Won't you tell me who I am? There is some mystery, Davy, won't you clear it away? Why does my father never come? Tell me that. I am not a child any longer. I must know, Davy, I must know," and she rested her curly head upon his broad breast and broke down into tears.

"My dear child, don't give up to tears so. You

have always been such a brave, cheery girl, and everybody loves you. Nobody cares about your father. He must be dead—yes, yes, he must be dead. Why this sudden outburst of curiosity?"

She told him of the incident of the Vivian visit to the school, and of hearing the remarks of Mrs. Vivian, reflecting slightly upon her parentage, until Davy warmed up with indignation at an insinuation from such a source as the mistress of "The Oaks."

"Dry your tears, my little angel. She is not worth anything so sparkling and bright as one of your tears, and the day will come when she will rue the hour that she ever uttered a word against you."

"I told Mr. Vivian when he kindly spoke to me—it was lovely in him, Uncle Davy, wasn't it?—that I hate her—and so I do—so I do—but I love you, Davy—I love you!"

"Oh, bless you, my little girl! If I had the power I'd take a big brush and sweep all the cobwebs of mystery from the walls. So dry your tears and think of old Davy—and your darling mother. Now run home, and sing as you go. Good-bye!"

She watched him out of sight. Her heart was too heavy—its strings were out of tune—she could not sing, but wept.

CHAPTER III

THE COMING OF A CHAMPION

WHEN the Vivians were making their adieux to Mr. Pennington, who had followed them to the door of the school, the absence of George, who had lingered for the parting word of consolation to May, was not noticed except by Mrs. Vivian.

Mr. Vivian and his wife led the way through the grounds to the gate. Charles and George, talking together, followed slowly. Mrs. Vivian broke the silence.

"I wonder why George forgot the dignity of his social position by going out of his way to speak to that Manning girl," she said.

"I am sure I do not know," said Mr. Vivian, gently, "though in the kindness of his heart, he may have stopped to congratulate her upon her ability."

"That girl somehow is a thorn in my side; and, why it is so, I cannot say."

"Some unjust and petty prejudice, no doubt, originating in an imaginary dislike, which is all very wrong."

"Wrong or not, I cannot help it."

"Why, you do not know the girl."

"Neither do you," retorted Mrs. Vivian.

"Then I am not going to express any unfavorable opinion concerning her. On the contrary, I find myself drawn toward her, with a very warm sentiment of

regard, which I am sure shall grow to be more than an ordinary interest in her and her welfare."

"Oh, yes, that is just to be contrary, nothing else!"

"No, you wrong me. I have no desire ever to be contrary. That is not my nature, especially with you, my dear."

"How can you say that? Our opinion is not the same in this regard, consequently we differ, as we do on many topics."

"Not unpleasantly, I trust," said Mr. Vivian, trying to be as calm and as conciliatory as possible.

"How can it be otherwise? A woman loves her own way, and when she is crossed in it, her blood is not expected to remain normal all through the inward conflict she is compelled to undergo, even though outward appearances oftentimes indicate peaceful submission."

"Well, you'll forgive me, I know, though you should permit reason to prevail as a pacifier in these inward conflicts. Now, this is a very simple matter that is greatly agitating you—an innocent cause to produce such an effect. This pretty girl who from my viewpoint possesses personal magnetism, inspires you with feelings of dislike. Now, in all reason, should that cause any difference between us? I like the girl——"

"I don't. But I prefer that she not be made a subject of conversation between us."

"If that is going to make you happy, then your happiness is assured, for you know, my dear, this is a conversation upon a topic entirely of your own making. It seems to me, though, that you are emphasizing her existence by having her prominent in your thoughts and insisting upon talking of her."

"Yes, it is just such notice from you and your sons

that will spoil her completely, and give to her a precocity that will make her a forward and impudent little minx."

Mrs. Vivian had quite warmed up to this last remark, and even had paused to stamp her foot for emphasis.

At this moment Mr. Vivian's sons overtook them and George, overhearing Mrs. Vivian's last remark, repeated it.

"'An impudent little minx!' Come, come, don't be unkind. You know very well you wrong the little girl, for she never did a thing to your knowledge that can justify you in speaking of her in that way."

"That's right, go on belittling yourself and your father's family by being the champion of this fatherless child, whose mother is disgracing herself by appearing nightly on the public stage in the shameless part of a ruined woman."

"Well, Madam," said George, concealing his indignation, "as you are not sponsor for either herself or her mother, I cannot see why you should at all concern yourself with them."

"I shall not stand to be insulted by you, and must claim the protection of your father."

"Pardon me! I did not mean to insult you. You are my father's wife, but never expect me, his son, to hear you visit upon May Manning any unjust aspersion without my resenting it. I say this kindly, but most positively."

"Remember, George," said Mr. Vivian, "to whom you are speaking. She is your stepmother and should command proper respect from you boys."

Mrs. Vivian, hurrying on, went alone up the steps and into the house.

"Father, there's my hand," said George, giving him an affectionate clasp. "I would not wound you for the world, but with that abundance of benevolence, that love of goodness, that generous portion of kindness and consideration, with which your nature is filled, and which is instilled into us boys, it cannot but grieve you to hear even one who is so near to you as a wife wilfully, and without cause, visit upon an innocent girl such unjust and unfounded vituperation. I heard her to-day in the school make some comment upon the girl's mother being an actress, as if that were a disgrace. May heard it, too, and went home in tears because this great lady of 'The Oaks' had crushed her heart."

"You are quite an actor," said Charles, who, having taken no part in the controversy that had increased into considerable feeling, now hoped to give the matter a less serious aspect. "Anyway, George, what is this May Manning to you, that her defense should move you to such elocutionary flights?"

"Come, boys," said Mr. Vivian, "a truce to all this discussion, and let us hope that it will not again be the occasion of any discord in our home, or among us, where love on every side should prevail and control every action."

"Oh, you dear, good father," said Charles, "one might know that you would oil the troubled way, so that the dust of discord might be kept down."

"I am for peace at all times," Mr. Vivian replied.

"Yes," said George, "I have heard you often called 'Good, easy man,' and I know it is so; but, if it has given you happiness, I know it must be right, even if it raises the doubt as to what people call your strength of character."

And so ended the interview in which the spirit of May Manning had been in part the control medium.

As the father turned into the house and the sons watched his receding form, Charles remarked:

"He is a dear old man, and we should honor his every whim."

"Yes, that is so," said George, "and by our loving attentions to him to make him happy, for, between us, I think sometimes that with all the blessings which are showered upon him there is lacking some one ingredient to make his happiness complete. He is thoughtful at times, and it is in those reminiscent moods that he seems not to be himself. Oftentimes when I have found him thus ruminating, my voice, however gentle, has startled him, and when I say pleasantly: 'Where have you been with your thought-cap on?' he'd in good humor give it back to me in his answer, 'Why just taking a trip through the past, that's all, with no apparel save a travelling-cap,' and then with his appreciation of his own wit, in a modest way, he'd laugh himself back to the present."

"It has occurred to me also," responded Charles, "that he is not drinking of that full cup of happiness he so richly deserves, and I have been uncharitable, I fear, in visiting some of the cause upon the woman he has chosen for a life-companion."

"So you have observed it, too," George said, thoughtfully. "I fancied that one of your profession, upon perceiving such a condition of affairs day in and day out would have been too magnanimous even to hint at it. I am the worldly fellow and expected to do worldly things, and to say what may be called worldly truths. Our stepmother is not an angel, by any means, and if she continues to cast any reflections upon

this little girl, May, we are going to have a great big shake-up, until 'The Oaks' shall rain acorns of discord upon the head of a very prominent member of this family."

"Forbear, George, for father's sake. Let our love for him help to lighten his cares, rather than add to them."

They had been so earnestly engaged that they had not noticed the approach of Nathan Thorn, a town character and a sadly interesting creature, entitled at once to sympathy and consideration.

Mentally disordered, Thorn was dependent upon the constant care of others. Gentle in his actions, harmless in his ways, he was an object not to be feared, but really to be pitied. His life had its story, but little of it had been revealed. In his boyhood he was a musical prodigy, and in early manhood he had devoted his life to the study of music in the conservatories of Leipsic and Paris, until as a composer and organist he won recognition as a master throughout the musical world. Down the aisles of many a cathedral his creations of harmony were resounding, while the brain that had created them had grown nerveless and dark.

The same old causes, alcohol and morphine, had done their work and had landed him, in an unexplained manner, upon Davy Burton's homeplace a wreck of what he must have been at the head of his divine art. His dissipation had marred his features, which, however, still retained some of the handsome contour for which he had been distinguished.

In the field surrounding Davy's home he fashioned a rough, soundless thing, resembling an organ. At this he would sit for hours, as if at the keyboard, in-

spired by the sounds he fancied were issuing from the pipes constructed of solid logs. Though he oft-times attracted curious groups of persons by his fingering and the gyrations of his body in its swaying and his feet movement over the pedals, he never permitted the idlers to disturb him. He did his work with a singularly forceful suggestion of technique and execution, as if he had been the prince of entertainers engaged in a recital of the old masters. Not only at his home but along the thoroughfares was he often seen sitting thus engaged, running over imaginary ivory keys with his fingers. He was never without a roll of music, or at a loss for consecutive thoughts upon musical themes, so he was known as "Old Music," "Musical Nathan," "Crazy Nathan," and "Simple Nathan." He roamed *ad lib.*, without guile or harm, as he had so long been one of the features of the town that not even the children feared him, but rather delighted in the pranks of this overgrown child who was always earnest in his life mission of interpreting the creations of those great men long since passed away.

As he neared the two Vivians he broke in upon their tête-à-tête with an "Ah, boys, how are you?"

"Well, Nathan, how goes the day?" asked George. "What news in the musical world?"

"An inspiration—a delight!" said Nathan, unrolling a sheet of music, "'Angel Footsteps!' Simply great!"

"The footsteps?" queried Charles. "Your figure is wrong. Angels use their wings and not their feet, Nathan."

"Poetical license, gentlemen," said Nathan, with as keen a sense of appreciation of the conversation, seem-

ingly, as George and Charles. "‘Footsteps’ it is, ‘footsteps,’ it shall be. Oh, it is grand!"

Seating himself on a rustic seat by the fountain, he turned to its ledge and with all the mannerism of an organist at a bank of triple keyboards he played and played.

"Don't you hear it, gentlemen? Don't you hear it? Now lightly upon the clouds she steps, timidly and slowly, so gently, upon a misty slope—so difficult! Now slipping back, she lifts herself upward to a resting-place. Now one, two, three, four—off again, tripping along the silver edge—tinkle, tinkle, tinkle, hear the silver. Up and down the keys I run—touching here and touching there. Oh, how glorious! Don't you hear it, gentlemen, don't you hear it? It is simply transporting."

As he was entirely absorbed, George and Charles very gently left him, and as they came into the house they could hear above the rippling of the fountain's falling water,

"Can't you hear it? Can't you hear it?"

CHAPTER IV

A MINISTERIAL CADDIE

As cheerful as the morning, Ona Leland, accompanied by George and Charles Vivian, in her dogcart drove up to the front gate of the Leland home. There they alighted and were greeted by Mrs. Leland.

"Mother, dear, you can never guess who played caddie for me at the links this morning," said Ona, laughingly.

"I am not good at guessing, my child, but I hope you were grateful and generous, for I know of no more tiresome position on earth, and one that so tries human patience as that of a caddie for a woman."

"Why, mother, what a fulsome and very embarrassing answer! But can you not guess?"

"Of course not."

"Why, the Reverend Charles Vivian, Rector of St. Clement's Parish, assisted by his literary brother, Mr. George Vivian. Now if there's a girl in the four counties who can beat that I'd like to see her."

"Well, young gentlemen, I congratulate her upon such helpmates."

"You may well congratulate me, mother, dear, for they saved my life."

"That's a little too strong, isn't it, Miss Ona?" pleaded Charles.

"Let me have my way, won't you, in so simple a thing as a life-saving service, please."

"What has happened, my daughter?" asked the mother, anxiously.

"We were coming down the road to the bridge, Nancy at a slow trot, when Nathan leaped from behind a pile of logs by the old Mill. He was waving a paper and crying, 'Hear the footsteps!' Nancy did not hear them, but she saw the white paper waving, and, being startled, was off like the wind. I lost my head and the reins at the same time, and but for the brave act of George, who leaped over the dashboard and onto Nancy's back, and reached for the trailing lines, I fear your daughter would not be here now to tell of it."

"Truly, gentlemen, I thank you for——" the grateful mother began. But George laughingly interrupted her.

"All's well that ends well," he said, "and, Miss Ona, when again you want a caddie, or an outrider, please command me."


They were about to leave, when Dick Leland, Ona's handsome brother, just turning twenty-two, came strolling down the walk.

"Here, Dick, do your sister a favor," said Ona. "Use the cart to help my rescuers on their way. It is at your service, gentlemen!"

"And so am I," said Dick.

As the trio drove off, mother and daughter waved their hands after them.

The Lelands lived on the opposite side of the town from the Vivians, and were held in high regard socially. They were wealthy and their family was both old and distinguished. Richard Leland, its late head, had been engaged in mercantile pursuits which yielded to him a large fortune. He had been a fore-



most citizen and was greatly respected. He had filled responsible positions on several boards of banks and insurance companies, and was one of the wardens of St. Clement's Parish, for the spiritual welfare of which Charles Vivian was responsible.

In the social world and church circles Mrs. Leland expected such recognition as her position demanded, but far from being overbearing or haughty, she was very sensible, and was conceded to be unusually generous. Her widowhood seemed to draw her closer to her daughter. Like sisters, they shared each other's confidence and made home, as far as they were concerned, the dwelling-place of contentment.

Dick had not been a father's joy, nor was he a mother's pride. He toiled not, neither did he spin, and the morrow gave him little concern. "Gentleman Dick" he was called, and there was no circle in which he was not welcome. College trained, and clever as a writer and sketcher, Dick still left much to be desired. He had, in fact, lost some of his moral ballast, and his wayward rolling was a matter of discussion among the knowing ones about town before it was suspected in his home. There the mother was the first to mark his laxity. The sister saw only good in him.

Notwithstanding his faults, however, Dick was a lovable fellow, and popular with all who knew him. Every day brought forth a mother's prayer for him, and the hope was indulged that ambition might spring up at some lucid interval in the youth, and that he would yet pleasantly surprise his relatives.

After Dick had so cheerfully obliged his sister in carrying off the Vivian boys, Ona turned to her mother.

"It is odd that Charles Vivian should return here

to be the rector of our Church, isn't it?" she said. "I do try to respect his position, but to me he is Charles Vivian, schoolmate."

"Yes, daughter, it does seem odd that you new people are growing up about me, a sure indication that time is not resting with me, either. I have seen those boys grow, and though I must regard them as having attained new dignity, still I cannot think of addressing them other than as 'George' and 'Charles.' Your father and George Vivian, Senior, were close friends, and were mutually interested in business deals."

"I like them very much," said Ona, with a sweet natural manner.

"Yes, so do I, but it seems strange to have the gospel of the day read to you by one who, in days gone by, was attracted over our garden wall by the seductive fruit. In the very solemnity of the lessons at times I see myself inflicting a sort of motherly chastisement upon his cherry-lined person, as I was wont to do in his boyhood days. He is very talented, and I believe will prove to be a worthy and an able rector."

"I confess it is embarrassing to me to know just what to call them, mother. I find myself saying 'George' and 'Charles,' when I know I should say 'Mister.'"

"Be yourself always, my dear, and I know that I shall not have the occasion to be less proud of you than I am to-day."

CHAPTER V

A PHILOSOPHICAL COBBLER

"Drop me at the Rectory, Dick," said Charles as they were approaching the Church, and on arriving there he alighted with this cordial parting:

"Now, Dick, don't make yourself so scarce. My days are usually spent in the study, and I'll be glad at any time to welcome you. Don't think the less of me because I have become a rector."

"I'll try not," was the merry fellow's response.

"Now where do we go, George?" said he, picking up the slack in the lines and hinting to Nancy, with the slightest touch of the whip-lash, that speed would be in order.

"Let's drop in on Sam, the cobbler, and learn what's new in this little world in the gossip line, and be advised as to whose soles have gone wrong. Is he still singing and studying at his work? I shall never forget his rat-a-tat-tat of my early boyhood as he drove the pegs into the leather."

"Yes, he still sings and rhymes from morn till eve, and keeps an open book of some kind always beside his bench. There's a fellow who is as happy as the day is long, proving that wealth is not the only promoter of happiness."

"Yes, he's a philosopher, truly," said George, "and, though an humble one, the lesson of his life, because of its simple purity, impressed upon me when a boy,

has caused me many a time to turn a thought that has resulted for my benefit."

They approached the old landmark—the shoe-shop—which, with the exception of occasional coatings of paint, had known little change. In the yard, between the street fence and the house, the geraniums and primroses were still in bloom, and above these, on the border line with the adjoining yard, hung the familiar sign indicating that the town shoemaker could be found within.

"Do you know, when I was an urchin," said Dick, "that sign always had something about it that was unintelligible to me. A great boot—the word 'And'—then a shoe and the word 'Maker.' Not being familiar with rebus reading, I could never make out anything save 'And Maker.' So I read it always 'S. Tanner—and Maker.' And it was not until I was older, that I discovered the Boot and Shoe, as a part of the information intended to be conveyed by the elaborate swinging signboard."

Through the window they could see Sam, seated on his bench, as of yore, engaged in earning his daily bread. They paused to hear him singing, keeping time with the hammer's swing:

"I laugh, ha! ha!
I sing—rat, rat.
Every peg goes home
With a rat-tat-tat!"

"'Tis joy, ha! ha!
To work, tat! tat!
I'm working for home
With a rat-tat-tat!"

"Ah, Sam," said George, as they entered, "at your old occupation—of uniting song and labor."

The cobbler, smiling with pleasure, half rose, and held out his hand.

"Welcome, Master George—thrice welcome!—and to you, Master Dick, who are so often with me. I'm honored, gentlemen, by this call and delighted to see you. Be seated, Master George, take the chair with a back, and you, Master Dick, take the apprentice seat, over there by the window."

"You are little aged, Sam. Your spirit seems as youthful as in times gone by when I used to seat myself here for the patch to be put on 'while you wait.'"

"Yes, Master George," responded Sam. "I don't want to get old, but Time is not any more partial to me than to all the others of his children. I try to keep happy and content with my lot. I have been blessed with health, and, notwithstanding the encroachment of the 'ready-made,' I continue to enjoy liberal patronage from our good people."

"Whose confidence you still enjoy, no doubt," added George, "while these walls, as usual, hear all of the gossip of the town."

"Well, I confess my friends are kind enough to keep me posted upon sundry little matters concerning movements in various circles. I suppose some of them feel that they must have a confidant, who, being stationary, cannot keep a secret going."

"What a book you could write, Sam!" George exclaimed. "While pegging and stitching, you have had nearly two generations under your observation. What a leveller you are! Rank, distinction, riches nor poverty find no special favor here. You work for all."

"Yes—

"The King and beggar are all the same to me,
It is not Ego, but Soles, I see.
Shoes of every size, upon all missions bent,
Stop here; so, while mending, I also pay the rent."

"Why, Sam, you're a born poet," said George.
"Like wine, you improve with age. But, bless me,
what an array of shoes!"

"That's so, Master George. There's the little pair—the Jones child's—only requiring a tip at the toe. Did it ever occur to you that shoes are memory-holders? Now take this pair of infant's. Is there anything in the world that could so vividly recall a little toddling, if it had been called to the other side, better than those shoes? They tell you it was learning to walk. Don't they suggest a pinafore, and a sweet face looking up into the mother's heart? What could bring tears quicker than a pair of shoes that baby wore? Those are Major Murdock's—run down at the heel, like the Major himself. Davy Burton's here indicate his character for care, good condition. They represent the good work of the maker, but now they need just a few iron pegs to keep the right one from running over. A pair of your sister's, Dick—light on her feet and a graceful walker—the kid torn a little by the step of the dog-cart. These heels of wood are Mrs. St. Clair's—pretty high, and very Frenchy."

"She's a pretty high-stepper, isn't she, Sam?" asked Dick, who had been quiet for some time.

"I don't exactly understand the term, but I do know that Colonel St. Clair allows her to do as she pleases, and I daresay she does—from all accounts. She entertains a good deal, and some of the young gentlemen, in talking of it, call her entertainments 'bohemian'—whatever that means. I know in our Church Society

we have 'Bees' and 'Bungles' and 'Quiltings' and games, but we never had 'Bohemia,' so I suppose it is something Mrs. St. Clair has learned from her city relatives. You know she spends much time away, and one can pick up ideas by travel. She is popular with everybody, and very active in all kinds of society work for charity. In 'living pictures' she caused a good deal of comment because she was going to be the 'Greek Slave'—I suppose to allow her to show some of her pretty dresses. They tell me she's got a lot of 'em. Somehow, it fell through. I heard that the old Colonel told her if she was going to appear as that Greek he would appear as Apollo—so they didn't have it, and——"

"Now, here's a pair for some tiny feet. Whose are those?" broke in George, more for the purpose of checking the volubility of Sam, who was getting under good headway, than from any marked curiosity about shoes.

"Those belong to the sweetest maid in all the town—the little angel who has a place in the heart of every living being. Can't you guess?"

"As her feet have not yet made any footprints on my heart, so far as I know, how can I guess?"

"Why, May Manning, sir, to be sure."

"I kiss her shoes in token of my respect," gallantly cried George. "You're right, Sam. All I hear of her is echoed by the sentiments you express."

"Oho, George!" cried Dick. "She's caught you, too, has she, with that irresistible magnetism of hers? She is just a little shy of me. I'm afraid she has an idea that I'm sort of wild, but, like the rest, I am fond of her, and can't help it. I have watched her growing and developing each day in beauty, and there is really

something interesting in watching the unfolding of the bud into the flower of girlhood."

"You're a man of the world, Dick, but I guess your heart is in the right place," responded George.

"Talking of the angels, Miss, we hear the rustle of her gown," said Sam, as a bundle of sweetness seemed to drop in among them, and there stood May, in school attire, books and hat on her arm. Diana-like, her curls were given to the winds to scatter.

"Sam, I've come for my shoes. Oh, gentlemen, don't let me intrude."

"Intrude!" Dick exclaimed. "Could you intrude anywhere? I believe you'd be welcome in Heaven."

"Now, Dick, stop," said she, laughingly. "It is sacrilegious for you to refer to Heaven in that way. Mr. Vivian, you see I scold him whenever I get a chance."

"Such a scolding from you has pleasant compensations," remarked George, gallantly. "I am sure I thought the same thing, even if I did not express it."

May blushed prettily, but made no reply.

"Be careful, young gentlemen, lest you make her vain," cautioned the old cobbler, shaking his head gravely.

"That cannot be, you know," said George. "There is too much good grey matter under those flowing curls for that. Speaking of grey matter, what has the school done for it to-day?"

"Only disturbed it, I fear," responded May, with a smile. "I've a mixture there, equalled only by some of those in Auntie's Cook Book."

"How is that? Mr. Pennington has not been inflicting any extraordinary task upon you, has he?"

"No, nothing out of the regular, but teachers al-

ways expect a pupil to know as much as they do, and 'Penny' is no exception."

"'Penny'? Who is that?" asked George.

"Mr. Pennington, of course. I know I should not call him that, but out of school we all do. It's shorter and comes easy."

"What are the books you study, May?" asked George.

"That I carry, you mean," corrected May, handing them to him.

"'Rhetoric,' 'Gibbon's Rome,' 'Etiquette,' 'Business Forms,' Shakespeare's 'Julius Cæsar,' 'Arithmetic'—'Elocution'—and 'First Lessons in Latin.' Which is your favorite?"

"'Julius Cæsar' and 'Etiquette.'"

"Why this combination?"

"Well, you see, one is what to act, and the other how to act," said she, smilingly. "I couldn't help that. I do love Shakespeare. In fact, everything pertaining to the drama has a charm for me."

"You come naturally by that," replied George, and I have an affinity for it myself. I can't say why, unless the histrionic cloak belonged to some one in our family."

"Had you any actors in your family, Master George?" asked Sam.

"Yes, if I remember correctly. In my time in England there was a Charles Vivian, a family connection, who as an entertainer proved a great success. Some years ago he added laurels to his fame by being the founder in this country of a fraternity called 'The Elks,' which is growing rapidly and doing much for charity."

"I'd love to join it," said May.

"I belong to it, and George is going to join," said Dick.

"They are just lovely, those fellows!" exclaimed May, "and I am never happier than when I am assisting in their work. Last year, at their charity benefit, I did the 'Potion Scene' of 'Juliet.' You know it, don't you, Mr. Vivian?"

"Yes, I know it well, and I should so much like to hear you in it."

"You shall, at any time, as you know it will make me happy to please you."

"That's very kind of you. How about the present? Can you recall it? Dick, can you spare the time? Sam, you can take a holiday for a few moments from your pegs, and let us transform this temple of galoshes into a hall in 'Capulet's House,' and imagine around us the delicate tapestry and drapery of *Juliet's* chamber. Here, Dick, get up and pull that bench out for the couch, and hang at the end these leather aprons for curtains. Take off yours, Sam, and fasten it there by the window.

So both were busy while May laid aside her hat and looked on while the scene was made ready for her.

"Now the properties," said George. "Here," picking up the awl, "use this for the dagger."

"Is there a dagger in it?" asked Dick.

"Yes," said May, quickly. "Don't you remember? She says, 'Lie thou there,' as she places it down, to take up the vial——"

"Oh, yes, the vial," said George. "What shall we use for that? Here, this bottle of liquid blacking, but be careful. It will not poison, but it will smirch you. Now, are we ready? Sam, you sit there in your accustomed place. Dick, mount the counter as a gal-

lery god, and I'll be stage-manager. Now, go ahead. 'Farewell, God knows when we shall meet again.' That's where you start, isn't it?"

"Yes," said she, and so recited every line to "Romeo, I come—this do I drink to thee." It was a revelation and her audience was spellbound.

Dick was so elated that he lifted a package of wooden pegs and said:

"'Were this sparkling wine, I'd drink to thee, and then shower the effervescence upon you,'" and, suiting the action to the word, he filled the air with pegs, which May caught in her hair and apron.

"You cruel fellow, think of this trouble to Sam. Now you've got to pick up every one."

"Don't worry about that, Miss," said Sam. "We are all so proud of you that we are willing to get on our knees to gather them up again. Come, Master George, and Dick, down on your marrow bones."

And down they went.

"I am sorry that 'willing hands make quick work,'" said George. "I wish it were a bushel instead of a quart of them."

"Oh, you men are all alike—inclined to flatter—are you not?" said May.

"Not always," said George. "It requires a subject and an occasion—then we can't help it. I speak for our sex. Allow me to say, though, that I am so pleased with your conception and rendition of the lines of 'Juliet' that, if agreeable, I promise myself the pleasure of studying some passage with you."

"I should feel much honored," said she, modestly. "Now, my books—my hat—my shoes."

George handed the books, Dick the hat, and Sam the shoes.

"Thank you, gentlemen, I am going now to the Hospital to carry some flowers. Oh, I forgot to pay you, Sam!"

"No, no, Miss! I am paid a hundredfold. I am indebted to you."

May insisted, however, and left the coin on the counter, then Dick said:

"May, if George will excuse me I'll give you a lift, as we say, on the road, on your way."

"Oh, no, don't trouble yourself, Dick. I'd prefer you to give Mr. Vivian the drive."

"And I prefer," said George, "that he will give you the pleasure, though I envy him a thousand times."

While saying this, he was helping her into the cart. Then, with Sam, he watched the dog-cart until it turned out of sight.

CHAPTER VI

A WOMAN OF THE WORLD

"DRIVE home first, Dick. I must leave my books and get a few flowers. I'll not keep you waiting, as Aunt Cynthia said she would have them ready when I came."

"All right, May, your pleasure is mine. I guess Ona will think I have run away, anyhow, so being out a little while longer will not matter to her. Nancy is the only one to complain, though if she knew that she were serving you I am quite sure she'd say, 'Don't mind me.'"

"Oh, Dick, you're such a jollier!" said she.

"There you go with that expression. Can't you find something else? Only ordinary girls use that, and you know you are not an ordinary girl."

"Thank you," said May, naively. "I thought I reached the ordinary, at least, in your estimation."

"You do, May, and I can only see my way out of the corner by acknowledging you extraordinary," and Dick breathed a sigh of relief.

"There you are again. Well, I guess you can't help it. You should take something for it."

"What shall I take—a kiss?"

"Tut-tut, Dick, you don't mean that, surely."

"Oh, yes, I do, too," said Dick earnestly. "There's no harm."

The color fled from May's cheeks. Then she answered, quietly:

"The harm is this: By such an act you would break forever our friendship which has existed from childhood. Need I give you any better reason?"

"No, May. I'll not do so without a special permit, but should I know of any other fellow intruding upon those sacred preserves, I'll down him if he were the Cardiff Giant."

"There! We'll shake hands on it, though I could not claim your protection that far," said she, giving him her little hand, which he held for a moment.

"I'll pay the tribute of profound respect to you, May, by kissing your hand," Dick replied, as he raised it to his lips. "You have, in your own sweet way, taught a lesson which should ever be a guide to my sex. Just think kindly of me, and, come what will, have faith in me."

This little proposal and gentle rebuke had brought the roses to May's cheeks. The resulting embarrassment was relieved by the appearance of Mrs. St. Clair, attired, as she always was, in the very latest of styles. Graceful in movement, stately as a queen, handsome in figure and features, which were set off by a generous hat with large white ostrich feathers, she was pleasant to look upon.

"Hello, Dick!" she exclaimed. "Stop, I want to speak with you. How do you do, May? Where are you going?"

"I am driving May over to the hospital."

"May I go with you—as a chaperon, on the back seat?"

"Oh, do," said May. "Dick is so dull, and we need you to brighten us up a bit."

Dick stepped down to help Mrs. St. Clair to a place in the cart, then off they started.

Mrs. St. Clair began immediately:

"Dick, first of all, I wanted to see you, to tell you that three charming widow friends of mine are coming down from New York to make me a visit, and while I cannot give them a New York time, as everything is so slow here, I must depend upon you and my friends to make it pleasant for them. So you and the boys will drop in to see us, won't you?"

"Will I?" exclaimed Dick, whose eyes grew bright with enthusiastic expectation.

"That's a dear fellow, Dick. And now that the Vivian boys are back from abroad, be sure to have George come. Of course, I cannot expect Charles, except in a pastoral call as the rector. But my friends, I fear, would find a rector—well—just a bit tame. You understand, of course, I like Charles very much. I have watched him grow. But there are occasions and occasions, and my spiritual guide shall have his. But you shall have yours. May, don't mind how I run on with Dick. He knows me as well as he does his mother, and he has to obey both of us. Now, my dear, a word with you about our little society—The Penny League. We are going to meet on Saturday afternoon and you must not be absent, for you are one of my mainstays."

"Oh, Mrs. St. Clair, don't say that, for I'm a very humble member, indeed, though I love to feel as if I am doing some good in the organization. You see, being but a schoolgirl, I do not get the time to be of great service. How is it getting along?"

"Oh, swimmingly. I am inordinately proud of being its founder. You see, it is not confined to any

one denomination, every Church now has its branch; and you'd be surprised how generous a showing can be made with penny contributions."

"What is this League, Mrs. St. Clair?" asked Dick. "If you and May are in it, and my sex is not excluded, I'd like to join."

"All right, you can do so if you like."

"What are the conditions and objects?"

"To be eligible you must be able to save your pennies, and either at the weekly or monthly meetings you will be expected to bring them, or send them to the treasurer."

"Here," said Dick, putting his hand in his pocket, "here's a dollar for you!"

"No, sir, I can't take it. That would be a gross violation of the rules. If you'll give me one penny as your contribution, I'll take it, and a dime as your entrance fee. That is the very thing to be observed, and why I organized it. Pennies come by way of change and get into the pocket and purse, and often in the way. A little bank, just like a child's, should be upon the dressing-case, and will encourage the habit of dropping in the pennies to keep company with each other. Every Saturday send the bank to the League and it will be opened and returned."

"Well, now for the object," said Dick.

"Oh, yes! I hadn't finished. This fund is to provide a welcome for infants when the angels, in the usual way, present them to poor families, so that the world may not seem so cold to the little strangers."

"A very simple, but, indeed, an original and laudable purpose, and the League will have my spare pennies. So, May, will you do me the honor to propose my name at your next meeting?"

"Indeed, I'll be glad to do so," replied May.

"I'll see that she does not forget it," said Mrs. St. Clair. "This may seem a very simple thing, but you'll be surprised at the widespread good that is being done. In our little place here the report shows in the various Leagues five thousand pennies received from all sources, which means five hundred dollars. Now you can realize the truth of the adage, 'tall oaks from little acorns grow.' We have assisted more than twenty families, and we have a good balance in our treasury. We have Leagues in almost every State, the membership consisting principally of children. It has a manifold effect. It not only teaches self-sacrifice to the child contributor, but real assistance to charitable work."

"I heartily congratulate you upon being such a benefactress."

"You see, I'm not so bad as I seem. I am, I admit, a bundle of inconsistencies, and I pose as a study——"

"Where?" quickly interrupted Dick.

"Everywhere—I have more friends and enemies than any other person in town. I rejoice in the friends, and I am not at all disturbed by the enemies."

They had now reached May's home. Aunt Cynthia was waiting at the gate for her.

"Well, Aunt, here I am. I hope I have not delayed you."

"I am glad to see your friends, and I wish they would alight and accept the hospitality of our humble little home," said Mrs. Stokes, kindly.

"We can't stop now," laughed Mrs. St. Clair, "we are on our way to the hospital, but you are well represented by your lovely niece, of whom you are, no doubt, very proud."

"Oh, yes, May knows what a ray of sunshine she is to my heart, and gloomy indeed would be the home without her. I envy everybody who robs me of May's presence."

"That is a very lovely tribute, Miss May," said Dick, "and, coming from one who should know you better than all others, it should be all the more appreciated."

"Come, Auntie, hand me the real flowers, instead of throwing these bouquets at me, and we'll be off," pleaded the blushing May.

Mrs. Stokes had a big bouquet of flowers all ready, and handed them to the smiling girl.

Dick shook the reins and called to Nancy. Then, once more, the lively trio resumed their journey to the grim building in which the most praiseworthy impulses of many human hearts were wont to unite with medical skill in effecting the relief of human pain.

CHAPTER VII

IN THE ELKS' HAVEN

BOTH Dick and May sat mute while Mrs. St. Clair, with a volubility unequalled by the rotation of the wheels of the cart, repeated the gossip of the town, the State and the nation. Her hammer was at work and many were the knocks she dealt out upon defenceless heads—not unkindly, but in the manner of one who is pleased that the rest of the world is not any better. Even the mistress of the Oaks had to receive just a little touch *en passant*.

"If there's one woman in town," said the vivacious Mrs. St. Clair, "who is going to cross swords with me some time, it is the wife of George Vivian, and I am not going to be the first to retire with a scratch."

May now brightened toward the speaker, but did not presume to reply.

"Here we are at Davy Burton's," said May, at last.

"What is that queer-looking pile of timber over there on the lawn?" asked Mrs. St. Clair.

"That is Nathan Thorn's mammoth organ," said May, "and there he is approaching it now. It is time for the afternoon recital. He does not see us, so we'll keep under the shadow of the big tree and watch him."

Nathan approached with an artistic air, walked around the structure as if to examine the blower, then mounted the high seat and made the movements of one

pulling out certain stops. Then, after running his fingers through his hair with the self-satisfied manner of an artist, he started in. He played as if his life depended upon it.

"How strange it all is!" said Mrs. St. Clair.

"And to me quite sad," said Dick.

"He has been here a long time, but I know nothing of his history," said Mrs. St. Clair. "Do you, Dick?"

"Very little. I look at him and sympathize with him, as I would with any of God's creatures from whom reason had fled."

"He talks well," said Mrs. St. Clair, "and is an excellent writer. Is it in intervals, Dick, or can one get rational thoughts from him at any time?"

"I have found him to be a good talker," responded Dick, "but most always upon musical topics. His hallucination causes him to believe that he sees only the old Masters, and the means of interpreting their works rise up about him on every side."

"Has anybody yet heard him play a real Church organ?"

"No, I think not. I'd like to try him some time."

"Why is he at Davy Burton's? Do you know, May?" asked Mrs. St. Clair.

"No. He was there when I came here. That's one of Davy's secrets. Oh, what a lot of them he has."

"Nathan must be a great care to him."

"Well, maybe so," answered May. "You see, Mr. Hardgone keeps the house and takes charge of Nathan. He has a wife. That tall, rather pretty country-looking girl who sits over in one of the side pews at Church is his daughter. Her complexion is perfect."

"Somebody must pay for him," mused Mrs. St. Clair. "Perhaps he is some relative of Davy's?"

"I never heard such a relationship mentioned," said May. "As well as I know Davy, and as often as I have been there and seen Nathan, the subject of his origin has never been discussed. I did say to Davy once that Nathan ought to be in a hospital, but he said, 'No, we are quite attached to him, and he's much better off here.'"

"What do you know of Davy Burton, May?" asked Mrs. St. Clair. "I have known him all my life, and as he came often in my way when a child I learned then to have the same affection for him that he appears to inspire in the children of to-day."

"I know this," answered May, "that he is to me—apart from my mother and aunt—the dearest friend I have on earth. He has been to me like a father. I find myself that near to him that I call him 'Uncle Davy.'"

They had now arrived at the gate of Vivian Park on the National Pike, about a mile beyond Davy Burton's home. They drove in through the massive gates, above which, intertwined in ornamental iron designs, were the letters "B. P. O. E."

The driveway to the building and round several terraces to the *porte cochere*, was a smooth macadamized road, under an archway of spreading maple boughs. On the right it skirted an inland lake of crystal spring water, which embraced in its windings about forty acres, and was large enough for all purposes of pleasure, such as boating in summer and skating in winter, besides furnishing fish for sport and the table, and ice enough for the town.

Upon an elevation stood a commodious structure of modern architecture, adorned with vine shaded verandas, from which, the verdure-embraced town, distant

hills and intermediate landscape always gave delight to the eye. It was a real home of modest elegance, and with a rest-inviting air about it. There were many who, overcome by life's struggles, and being entitled by virtue of membership in the Order to privileges of the Home, had accepted it permanently; while others, who could afford a period of vacation, chose to enjoy the Park for an outing and were willing to contribute therefor reasonable compensation.

The summer, of course, brought the greatest patronage, and transient guests of all professions, especially that of the stage, made here a pleasant rendezvous.

"Dick," said Mrs. St. Clair, "you're a member of this Order, are you not?"

"Oh, yes," said Dick, "I am proud to be."

"Then you can tell us about this place, for I'm ashamed to say it is my first visit since its dedication."

"I'm not such a good member," continued Dick. "I don't go to the Lodge often, I am sorry to admit, but I have always been interested in this Home."

"Why do they call it Vivian Park? After George's father?"

"No—and yes, if I may so reply. Charles Vivian, an English actor, was the founder of the Order, and George Vivian, our philanthropic citizen, was the benefactor, who donated this tract of land, so the name of Vivian combines the founder, sincerely revered, and the donor, gratefully respected. Therefore Vivian Park, as you will see, is a graceful tribute to both the living and the dead."

"Why, Dick, you talk like a book!" exclaimed Mrs. St. Clair laughingly. "Where did you learn the lesson? Go on, I'm quite interested. How does it strike you, May?"

"Oh, I like to hear it, but I have heard it so often told in public and private that I could tell it myself. These Elks are so proud of it. They are like girls I've heard talk of owning a Paris hat or a Worth gown. They never cease telling of it; it is always a new subject to them. Go on, Dick. I know Mrs. St. Clair will be interested."

"Well, you see, this Home was established and is maintained by the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, an American organization devoted to charity and humanity. The tract consists of five hundred acres, which were donated by Mr. Vivian, in trust for the objects and purposes to which it is dedicated. I have heard it said that in making the gift the donor acted contrary to the wishes of Charles, who is opposed to all such societies, you know. Before Mr. Vivian did this, many years were devoted to the establishment of such an institution, as it was difficult to settle upon a plan. A lack of wealth was never the question, for it seems that the membership of the Order has the widespread reputation of having large hearts and open hands, and whatever is done in the way of charity, when started, goes like an avalanche, except it is much quieter, as these fellows never let their charity make much noise. Some charity is like the sting of the wasp. The giver wants the recipient to feel it and feel it good, but desires also that the bestowing of it should be as noiselessly and effectively done."

"Bravo!" interrupted Mrs. St. Clair. "A good metaphorical figure, aptly drawn. Go on! I am really absorbed in your story."

"Well, contributions and endowments came pouring in, and Mr. Vivian, because of his genuine kind-

heartedness, offered this paradise, and the Elks' Home became a reality."

"How is it supported?"

"By the income from investments, and a small *per capita* tax levied upon the membership, which is now over the hundred thousand mark. What is not used goes into the general fund. You behold here the result of effort, also, that the best evidence of success is success."

"Yes," said May, who had been an attentive listener, " 'Laugh and the world laughs with you, weep and you weep alone.' "

"I respect the man who first uttered that sentiment," remarked Dick.

" 'Man!' 'Girl,' you mean, don't you?" said Mrs. St. Clair.

"I do remember that there was some question over the authorship. No matter who said it, it's true, anyhow, and the world is laughing with us, but at the same time if there's any weeping here these fellows shall not weep alone."

CHAPTER X

AN ACTRESS AND HER RÔLE

"Ah, the new letter-carrier," said Charles, who was seated upon the veranda of "The Oaks," as George approached with a handful of letters and papers.

"Yes, I was passing the office and thought I'd get the mail, especially as I had the key of the box."

"You certainly are thoughtful, as usual."

"Thank you," responded George, as he began the distribution, "but let me make perfect my new occupation by rendering 'unto Cæsar that which is Cæsar's!' 'The Churchman' for you, Charles," handing him a paper.

"And what is there for me?" asked Mr. Vivian, joining them upon the veranda.

"'The Speculator,'" said George, throwing to him a many-paged journal from London. "Some letters for Madam, the New York papers, and a new magazine, 'The Theatre,' for me. Now, let the reading begin."

"Pardon me," observed George, after a period of stillness, "but I cannot help it to save me. Here's a comment upon May's mother in her part at the Grand Theatre."

"You're a great fellow, George, and the Manning subject seems to be very near to your heart," observed Charles, looking up from his paper.

"Well, I don't deny that, but there is nothing sig-
si

nificant about it. My interest in all theatrical matters caused me to look at the criticisms and I was struck with this: 'Margery Manning is still adding laurels to her fame in her conception of the part of *Hester Prynne*. Could Hawthorne but see her he would acknowledge her as the ideal of his great creation. She has a form that is queenly, a face that is soulful and pretty, a manner unaffected, a carriage graceful, and a personality that is filled with magnetism. So tender, so touching, so appealing is she to the child Pearl, when she would have her kiss the minister, her father. Miss Manning's acting is strong throughout this whole scene, and is affecting when she utters the lines, in answer to the child's query: "Will he go back with us, hand and hand, we three together into the town?" "Not now, dear child, but in days to come he will walk hand and hand with us, we will have a home and fireside of our own. You will love him, and he will love you." ' ' "

"What did he say?" eagerly asked Mr. Vivian, as if the whole text were given in the criticism.

"You must get the book for the rest of it, but the story is, you know, that Dimmesdale told the people of New England, standing at the scaffold: 'At last, at last, I stand where I should have stood,' and pointing to a crimson letter upon her, exclaimed: 'God's eye beheld it, the angels were forever pointing at it!'"

"He did acknowledge it?" asked Mr. Vivian.

"Not until his heart was almost still and Death had come to take him from her."

"He had reasons for waiting," said Mr. Vivian, excusing the minister.

"Reasons!" responded George, warming up with intense feeling. "The idea, Father, of you suggesting

such a thing. I cannot from any charitable view see any defense for him. A man of holy calling, imparting Godly sentiments to his people daily, the living example of the pure in heart, how could he for so long a time face his Maker and that scarlet letter without making retribution?"

"Pride, I judge, held him from it," said Mr. Vivian.

"Pride! He was a moral coward, that's what he was."

"What would you have done, George?" asked Charles, who had refrained from discussing so grave a subject, in which one of his own profession had played an important part.

"I would have defied them in carrying out the law," said George, rising. "The letter never should have been placed there, but, finding it there, instantly I would have said, 'To Hades with these mental dwarfs!' and would have torn the sign from her breast and trampled it in the dust, and would have placed there my own living heart that all the world might see it."

"That is just the answer I expected from you," said Charles.

"Well, boys," said Mr. Vivian, "you'll find as you grow older that this is a strange world, and that while George has been growing excited over an imaginary picture, from fiction, yet Life is full of truth more marvelous than can be found in the play or story-book, and that even in a limited population, as in our small town, I have no doubt scarlet letters are inscribed upon the records of many a life. I feel sure of this, however, that none will ever be written by any one bearing the name of Vivian."

"We can answer for that," said Charles.

"I am glad to hear you say so," said Mr. Vivian, preparing to depart. "I am going to walk over as far as Davy Burton's, so I'll leave you to the enjoyment of your discussions; but, mind, don't get too far apart. I could not bear to hear of anything like that."

"Oh, no," said George. "We'll watch ourselves, but I promise you that I'll not let up on him, until I bring about a much-needed reform in some of his prosy notions of the old school upon many subjects about which we differ, and while I'd abjure the fact of his being sensational and called the 'Social Evil's Holy Terror,' I do want him above all things to be an up-to-date rector."

"Whatever that means, George," replied Mr. Vivian, "I judge you are too late, as the training of his English theological institutions is pretty well grounded. Eh, Charles?"

"Yes, in one sense, they mould character in fine shape in those Anglican kilns," answered Charles, "but if there's one particle of Americanism in you they never get it out, and that is the ingredient like unto leaven which leavens the whole. So, notwithstanding my prayers and vigilance, I fear I have just enough of the leaven left on hand to respect freedom of speech. I have my duty before me, and I shall be fearless in the discharge of it. I love the English; its Church is dear to my heart; its history and institutions are to me a source of delight."

"Well, my son, you do not forget, too, that our name and fortune come from England," said Mr. Vivian, going down the steps.

"I'll walk a part of the way with you," said Charles,

starting to join him. "George, what are you going to do?"

"I'll sit here and look over the papers, beginning with yours, Charles."

"All right, you're welcome! I trust you'll find in them something that will interest and do you good."

He had but seated himself and begun on "The Churchman," when Mrs. Vivian came out.

"Any letters for me, George?" said she, in a tone that showed much softening since last they exchanged words.

He arose and from the rail, where he had placed them when he came up with the mail, handed her several letters, which she received graciously.

"Thank you," said she. Then, after a pause, she added: "George, you don't like me, do you?"

"I don't like some of your ways, I confess," answered he.

"Well, can't I improve them so that I may meet the requirements that will give me favor in your eyes?"

"That depends," said George. "You are my father's wife, you are mistress of this home, and for father's sake I should respect you."

"I admit that. I should have your respect. I have never asked your love."

"Candidly, you have never tried to get it, and have almost lost my respect."

"Well, I am sorry, and I ask you to forgive me."

"Of course, Mrs. Vivian, should this spacious home ever assume proportions too limited for you and me, I shall very quickly leave, though I know such a move would deeply grieve my father. While we have had no serious outbreak, yet your insinuations and uncharitable comments about people I admire, and in

whom I show some interest, always cause friction, which I am not stoic enough to overcome, so the 'Don't tread on me' comes immediately into play, and I find myself distressing my good father by using plain words to you, as you very well know. I assure you, though, when I have said them, then it is over. So, now we'll have a truce, and I promise I'll not be the first to break it."

"I have resolved to keep myself from yielding to that hateful disposition of jealousy of everything and everybody, and I'll accept your aid in appointing you as monitor or censor to correct me when you find me in any way departing from my resolution. I am not unkind at heart, yet I find myself doing such unkind things and uttering very caustic remarks."

"I always fancied I could see a Mephisto about you."

"Yes," said she, "whispering, 'Now, do this,' 'Now, say that,' and I have never resisted; that is just about it, I confess."

"Well, should anything turn up, out of the way," said George, "then I'll know it is not yourself, but the old boy at work, and I'll call out to you 'Mephisto,' and you can then wake up and let him go."

"I agree to that, but, whatever I do, I hope not to offend you again," she replied.

As she stepped into the hall she said to herself, "Well, I've taken my first step towards reformation."

CHAPTER XI

SOUNDLESS SYMPHONIES

"WHAT are you up to, Nathan?" asked Dick Leland, who, in company with Hardgone, was passing Nathan's workshop and observed that he was busy over music sheets and blank paper.

"An inspiration, Dick," answered Nathan, without raising his eyes. "I am now catching it. I have just had a visitation from Wagner, and I am transcribing the harmonies. They are simply transporting. I wish I could play them to you. The air is filled with them, and they are beautiful."

He rested his head on the pile of music as if to listen.

"They are playing to me—the spirits are," he went on. "Heavenly sounds! Unwritten symphonies! Yes, yes, I catch them—every note. Oh, Dick, could you hear! Now softly drifting, dying away in a realm of sweetness, then coming again in grand, rolling sounds until it seems that throughout the spirit world in its movement it has added to its force until—fortissimo! Now, Dick, you must hear that! Oh, it makes me wildly jubilant with its soul-stirring melodies composed by spirit minds, played by spirit hands, sung by spirit voices. O Music, Music! I am thy slave! Thy chains are about me; I give my life, my soul to thee. Now, Dick, not a word. Don't disturb me; let me write. Let me catch the inspiration of the moment."

They quietly left his little domicile, with its pictures of the masters and disordered heaps of manuscript music, which furnished the life entertainment for the weak-minded musician. His hallucination—harmless, weird, and interesting—absolutely absorbed him, until he was lost to the world, except in lucid intervals when he was rational upon common topics. Not lacking in curiosity, though his eyes would be closed, his ears would be open to any discussion of family matters, and his memory was as sensitive as a receiving cylinder for the phonograph. Whether ideas thus caught remained, could not be known, but many an incident proved that he was the receptacle of secrets uttered at an unsuspecting moment in his presence.

Dick, with Hardgone, moved on to the stable to get his trotter, and just as he was leading his horse out, Davy came in from his usual round of social visits.

"Good day, Davy! I am glad to see you. Had I met you on the road I would have given you a turn to test the speed of that chump of yours," remarked Dick, laughingly.

"Chump eh, Dick? We've seen some years together, but in her younger days she took no dust from the heels of any horse, and if it were not for taxing joints that Time has tightened, I'd spur her up to some of the old pride and give you a run for your money."

"Surely, you don't mean it, Davy!"

"Yes, I do, and you'd go home with a much moistened and heaving nag, even if I could not keep up with you."

"Well, Davy, I am going to take that as a challenge and accept it for a day soon."

"All right. 'Old Faithful' never disgraced me yet

and I'll trust her to stand by me when pitted against young and high-toned odds."

"Well," said Dick, "I'll hasten on down the Pike and let traders going my way find fault with the dust in their eyes."

Hardgone, during the tête-à-tête between Dick and Davy, had held the horse and he now handed the lines to Dick.

The barking of the dog in the front yard announced the approach of visitors, which proved to be Mr. Vivian and Charles, who had walked together from home.

"Mr. Vivian," said Davy, "I am glad to welcome you, and you, Charles. It is not often that our humble home is honored by the presence of such callers. Here, Hardgone, greet Mr. Vivian!"

Hardgone came forward and added to the welcome.

"Well, gentlemen, I am glad to be so greeted," said Mr. Vivian. "Ah! Dick, how are you? I need not ask, for you always look like one to whom the world is kind."

"Thank you, sir," responded Dick. "I have no reason to complain. The world, I confess, is not an ice house for me, and I get out of it all the good I can."

"Yes," said Charles, "with the blessings God shows upon you in His bountiful kindness and generosity. Do you ever think, Dick, when you are enjoying these bounties, to feel grateful to the Giver of all?"

"Come now, Charles, cut out the serious. I suppose, being a rector, you feel as if you must give me that kind of racket. I guess I am grateful at heart, but really I am like many people in the same situa-

tion. I am so busy enjoying it all that I do not take the time to express gratitude even to God."

"I am not to be deemed as forcing my calling upon you, in asking you if you are grateful," replied Charles, "but, my dear Dick, it is my friendly regard for you and my duty to you. In comparison with others you are so fortunate."

"Well, I never complain. I appreciate your friendship, and that, I assure you, when I take the inventory, shall not be the least of my possessions. I was just about leaving when you arrived. Wouldn't you like to take an airing down the Pike?"

"I left George sitting on the veranda and half-promised to return early to join him in the morning reading."

"You mean," said Mr. Vivian, "the morning discussion. You boys are never together that you are not in some heated argument. I'll warrant he's waiting with some new topic upon which you'll be expected to join issue."

"Come, get in, Charles. If that is all to which you owe the duty of the hour, let me take the censure from George, if he has any to give, and I'll land you at George's feet within a given time, if you so desire."

"Your offer is tempting, and as I intended to make no formal call upon Davy, I'll leave father to do the full Vivian honors and will join you, Dick," said he, stepping into the runabout.

"Don't let him forget his calling, Dick," cautioned Mr. Vivian. "A fast horse has about it such a devilish sort of a fascination that even the rector of a fashionable church can't resist it. Through the mists of Time and the shadowy visitations to my existence I can look back to the days upon the turf, as it were, when the

sound of horse's hoofs made music to my ears, and the movement of speeding forms, a sort of delirious kaleidoscope to my eyes. Knowing that Charles has not inherited that love of sport, which I am glad to say brought no harm to me, I'll trust him to you."

"And well you may," said Dick. "Charles is his own protector, though I'll guard him well. But, Mr. Vivian, there are other things upon which young curates can hold the sign 'Danger!' as well as on a horse."

"True, very true," said Mr. Vivian. "Not only ministers, Dick, but all of our sex."

Dick's runabout then turned into the road and was soon out of sight.

CHAPTER XII

FATE AND A PARSON

"A good deal of dust," said Charles, the first to volunteer any comment since starting. "The country needs rain badly."

"Yes, it does," said Dick, "but, as to dust, we are getting more than we need to have."

"How is that?"

"Why, our neighbor in front there, with that old sheep, seems to be putting many particles in motion, and if you don't care, Charles, I'll whisk by him and let him see how it feels to get a dash or two."

"I'm agreeable, Dick, to anything that is agreeable to you. I am the guest, you know; you are 'mine host.'"

In front of them on the smooth road there moved a very ordinary vehicle drawn by a very ordinary looking horse and occupied by a very ordinary looking man. The lazy trot of the horse indicated that at the comfortable safe gait at which it was going was about its average speed, and the large hoof formation with a very heavy movement seemed to be doing its best at raising the dust.

Dick's sound signal to his trotter denoting the want of greater velocity was heeded promptly by a start that caused Charles to gesticulate wildly in grabbing for a hat that appeared to be about to fly from his head, and soon the space was shortened between them

and the dust-maker. Dick pulled the right rein and was turning out in order to pass the ordinary driver and horse which seemed in a doze. But the sounds of the hoof beats of Dick's animal caused the meditative man and beast ahead of them to take notice. Ears went back as if there was something doing on the Pike; new life entered the four legs. A thrill of electricity went up and down the back of the sober-gaited nag, and the tail which had been lazily swishing at flies took on additional zest and activity. The lever was moved around to the full-on notch. Dick did not pass on the first move and had to spur up a little to hold his place.

"This will never do," said Dick.

"No, no," said Charles, "pass it on the next spurt."

While determination had set in with Dick, it had also taken hold of the "ordinary" nag and the pair, now side by side, were making dust fly, but neither the one nor the other of them was getting it.

"Go it, Dick," said Charles, who was interested up to the encouragement point, as that was all he could do, except keep a hand on each side of his hat.

Wheels were parallel and almost in juxtaposition. Head to head were the horses. Dick was cool and held the lines in a masterly manner. The "ordinary" did not lag. Side by side still, on and on they went. Traps and rigs of all kinds turned out of the road to let them pass. They reached the great gates of the County Fair grounds; fortunately they were open; instinctively both turned in and were soon upon the regular half-mile course. Then they were off.

"Go it, Dick!" again uttered Charles, catching his breath, this being the extent of his vocabulary.

Dick was equal to the moment, and, forgetting his

companion and the world—all save his unknown and voluntary adversary, he was mumbling gentle words to his horse.

"Now, Zero, a lesson to the stranger. Don't fail me! Don't fail me! Zero, Zero, go, go, go!"

They are at the quarter, now at the half. Neck and neck they are in the finish, and down the home stretch.

"Now, Zero! Now!" cried Dick.

"Just a little faster, Dick," said Charles. "Only a few seconds more, and we're done. Now!"

He was panting with excitement, holding the seat with one hand and his hat with the other.

"Just once more, Zero," cried Dick.

Zero gave a spurt, and by a neck went under the wire. Dick won.

The stranger uttered one sentence:

"Them who gits ahead of me must do their best and be better'n me at that."

Then, resuming his lagging trot, he went on down the road as if nothing unusual had taken place.

"Well, Dick," said Charles, recovering, "you can never tell by looks, can you? It took you longer to whisk by that contrivance than you thought?"

"Yes, I confess so, and unwillingly. I have had our rector a participant in a real horse-race."

"Which has brought no harm to anybody, I trust, not even to our antagonist, who went off without ceremony—not even paying his respects to the victor, other than remarking, 'Them who gits ahead of me must do their best and be better'n me at that.'"

"If he is on the road he will now have no objection to our passing," said Dick, "as I judge he has realized from our encounter that we meant business."

They were now approaching The Rest, a road-house frequented by all classes, the social code not being a part of its government. Some excitement was prevailing, as around the doors and on the porch stood an expectant crowd of loungers gazing into the place. Just as they drove up they heard a woman's voice pleading within.

"What is the matter?" said Dick to one of the bystanders.

"Why, Jim Colton's wife is trying to get him home and Tom Dove, the new landlord, is having an altercation with her."

"What, a man having an altercation with a woman, because the wife is appealing to her husband," said Charles with much of his youthful spirit rising within him. "I'll see about this."

In a moment he was on the ground and springing through the crowd which stood in the doorway.

"Here," said he, addressing the landlord, whom he had seen pushing the woman towards the exit, "your hands off that woman. What do you mean, sir?"

"You attend to your business, and I'll attend to mine."

"My business is that of humanity, to protect defenceless women."

"Then keep them out of my place, interfering with my customers and breaking up my patronage."

"Oh, sir," said the woman, "Jim Colton is my husband; he's drunk, and I've been trying to get him away."

"Then take him away if you wish. He's yours."

"She shall not," said Tom Dove, "unless he goes of his own free-will. Come, get out of here," again

giving her a push. "I'll show your Christian friend what I'll do."

"Yes," said Charles coolly, "and I'll show you what I'll do. I am a Christian, but if forced to it I can be a fighting Christian."

All of his youthful blood was up, all of his athletic training came into full play. With a blow he landed Tom over among the tables, chairs, empty bottles, and glasses. Dick, who had handed the reins to a friend, was at his side in a moment.

"Here you, escort her out," commanded Charles, turning Mrs. Colton over to Dick. "I'll bring the husband. Which one is he?"

"I'm the one," said a drunken fellow.

"Then, come on," said Charles, kindly, "get out of this vile place and go home with your wife."

"Who are you to command me?" said Colton.

"I'm your friend. Here," said Charles to those around him, "be men, won't you? Don't stand there like drivelling cowards. Persuade this man to go quietly, otherwise I am going to make him by force."

"Go, Jim, with your wife," said one of them, and it was like the blind leading the blind, as he proceeded to help him out.

Tom Dove began to recover from his temporary stupor into which he had been knocked by the energetic blow of the rector, and began the process of getting himself together.

"Sir," said Charles, "if I have taught you a lesson I have done a Christian duty, even if it is out of the regular order."

"It was a striking sermon," said one of the crowd.

"Yes, gentlemen, it is out of the regular order, but when I see a man so cowardly as to lay hands on a

woman to strike or injure her, then I forget my calling for a moment to give a lesson in active Christianity. I wish to say to you, sir, that if you ever harbor Jim Colton on your premises again in a drunken condition or sell liquor to him at such a time, I'll have your place broken up and you driven out of the County."

"I ask your pardon, sir," said Dove, completely humiliated and frightened by this remark, as he knew the prejudices existing against his place, "I shall always remember the visit of the Parson."

The sentiment was somewhat divided on the outside, as to the right of anybody to interfere with a man in the prosecution of his business, but all united upon the championship of the woman and the protection of Jim Colton's wife when she was being assailed by the new landlord; but, more than all, as is always the case, they admired the pluck of the young rector and his skill in the art of manly defence, so when he came, following Jim Colton, whom he placed in the care of his wife, who was in charge of Dick, he was received with a perfect ovation and one of the wags sang out:

"Hurrah for the fighting dominie!"

When Dove ventured to brace up a little and realize the situation in the right light, he said to some of his regulars, "That minister may have God in his heart, but he has the devil in his fist. Walk in, gentlemen, it's on me. Name your poison, as we say in the craft, and I'll set 'em up."

There was no appreciable reluctance on the part of any of them in accepting the invitation.

"Well, Dick," said Charles, their backs being well turned upon The Rest, "my reputation will need a surgical operation to reset some of its disjointed parts after the experience of the last hour. Can you im-

agine any two more serious offenses to the Canon law and the moral, civil and social code, than being not only at, but in, a horse race and engaged actually in a fist-brawl at a road house of questionable character, guilty of assault and battery upon a Dove?"

"Yes, he's a bird, you're right."

This conversation was interrupted by a commotion in the grazing meadow of a farm they were then passing, and out of a cloud of dust came May Manning, who was making frantic efforts to escape from an infuriated cow. She was running with all her might toward the road.

Before Dick had checked the speed of Zero, Charles leaped to the ground. Into the low brush he pushed, and over the vine-covered, zig-zag rail-fence he went, all in a heap, leaving the tail of his clerical coat fastened securely between the pieces of a crossed section. Then with a rail which he had hastily picked up, he rushed to the rescue of May. She was almost exhausted when he reached her, and she fell fainting on the ground. A well-directed blow upon the head so stunned the cow that for an instant it was bewildered. Recovering, the animal made a straight head-dash at Charles. Dick endeavored to divert the animal, but Charles stood his ground and, being better prepared for this encounter, he brought down the rail again with heavy force just between the horns of the angry beast.

The force of the blow caused his weapon to slip from his grasp and left him defenceless. He was compelled, therefore, to take to flight. Not far distant was a haystack and toward this Charles ran, closely pursued by the cow. The rector's strength was almost spent when he reached the haystack with the infuriated cow at his heels. He stepped aside quickly, and in

another instant the cow had collided with the hard packed hay and fallen with a broken neck, dead.

Charles for a time was speechless, almost breathless. May having recovered from her fainting spell, ran toward him with Dick.

"Oh, bless you, Mr. Vivian," she cried, "I am so grateful to you. I hope you are not injured."

"Oh, no, May, not injured at all, thank you. A few more whiffs of oxygen and I'll be all right. But, Dick, I am of the opinion that the safest way to return home is by a balloon, don't you think so?"

"Yes, if you are going to have any more adventures. May, you, too, had a close call. How did you get that beast after you?"

"I took some jelly to Billy Green's mother, who has been very ill, and, after leaving the house, I thought I'd take a short cut across the field. Passing this cow, I said 'Co-Boss, Co-Boss,' and had no sooner uttered the words when, instead of coming gently to me, it started at me with a jump. I'm a pretty good runner, so I proceeded to get out of the way, and but for your timely entrance, Mr. Vivian, I would in all probability not be telling of it now. Oh, I do thank you. Had I been killed, it would have broken mother's heart."

Her face was buried in her handkerchief, and she gave way to hysterical sobs of nervousness.

"Not to me, my child," said Charles, "should be the outpouring of a grateful heart, but to Him who watches over even the birds of the air. 'Not a sparrow falleth but that He doth know.' How much more doth he guard the movements of so sweet a girl as you are, May, especially when you are engaged upon one of your angel missions!"

"Oh, sir! I am grateful to God, sir, and I trust we may see His wisdom manifested in the escape to-day of both of us."

"How did you come out, May?" said Dick.

"I walked. I like the exercise."

"Well, let me see; we three can sit upon one seat and you shall be the mascot to counteract the hoodoo which Charles has thrown around the trip."

"I will never forget that cow," said May.

"Nor I the trip," said Dick, "to my dying day."

"May we never have such another," he continued.

"Amen!" said Charles.

CHAPTER XIII

PIES AND STITCHES

ONA's hair, into which she had thrust a pink rose, was arranged with a studied carelessness which was becoming to her beauty. The morning gown of baby blue gave to her stately and graceful form a charming effect as she sat at the piano playing one of the lively selections of the day. Her mother, who had entered, gazed with admiration and pride upon her daughter.

"Ona, there you are again at that—what do they call it?—rag-time composition."

"Yes, it is one of my own. I think I'll call it 'When Ona Begins to Play.'"

"Oh, my child, it is very inelegant! You have had so much spent on your musical education that you should confine yourself to the classical."

"Now, mother, we must keep up with the times. This zig-zag stuff is so cheery, and is very popular. Do I look as if I ought to be playing 'Chopin's Funeral March?' My heart is light this morning, and I don't feel as if I could stand those great, measured, ponderous minor-chords. The melody is very sweet. Listen!"

Those soft strains which follow the introduction were touched off by her most perfect execution, then instead of continuing through Chopin's famous number she ivoried into an Ethiopian dance-song, which

caused Mrs. Leland to keep time with her slippered foot.

"Mother, what's the matter with that right foot? Keep it still."

"I must confess there is something irresistible in that jumpy time, though tastes are very much perverted to appreciate it. My daughter should always be in keeping with her station and play in the upper key."

"Yes, mother, I have known some of my girl friends continually on that key, who, being compelled to roam always in the field of the classical, have been doing 'rag-time' at heart. I can't do that. I must play as I feel. If I feel the part of Mrs. Leland's daughter, I'll give you a symphony; if I feel that I'm simply Ona, the child of happiness, then I must be permitted to indulge my fancy in happy music."

"Well, have your way, you always do; but let me remind you of your cooking-school lesson. What are you on now? Pastry, I think. Are you going to the class?"

"No. I have an idea that I'll read up the recipes and be my own teacher to-day, so I'll go to the kitchen and try my hand."

"All right. If you succeed we'll have homemade desert for dinner."

Ona began by displaying her beautiful arms, her sleeves being tucked up to her shoulders, and just as her hands were in the dough, who should approach from the yard but Dick and Charles, who had entered by way of the stable. Charles cut quite a figure, attired in what appeared to be an Eton jacket, the appendages of his Prince Albert being carried across his arm.

There was no escape for Ona, so she stood bravely over her pan of dough and had to allow her self-possession to visit upon her brother the censure for the surprise. The rector, of all other persons, to find her so!

"Dick!" exclaimed she, with an air of injured pride, "how could you be so inconsiderate as to cause me so much embarrassment? Mr. Vivian, I beg of you to pardon this very, very formal reception."

"Miss Ona, make no apology," said Charles, in a gallant manner. "I am the one to apologize for what I call an intrusion. I, too, must throw all the blame upon Dick, who insisted that I should come in and get repaired. So compose yourself and go on with your work. I consider it my good-fortune to find you thus engaged. It is refreshing sometimes to see how the lady of the parlor can become a kitchen-belle. I seldom see it. For the rector, the parlor manners are the invariable rule of his visits, so on with your occupation. I'll enjoy watching it."

"You are very kind, and as I am now in a state of recovery from the first blow, I'll go right on," said she, resuming her work. "Pass me the sieve, I need a little more flour; in the second barrel, please—that is the patent process. Now, hand me that book—read on page 27—there!"

Charles obeyed every command, and from the cook-book he read:

"In order to make the crust short, regard must be given to the quantity and quality of the flour. It must be sieved three times in order to obtain a lightness——"

"There," said Ona, "that will do. That's what I wanted to make sure about, the number of times

through the sieve. Now get me another scoop. Thank you, I'll shake it myself."

As he leaned over the barrel to get the flour, she could not refrain from commenting upon the dilapidated coat, which she had noticed before, but thought some quaint English idea had suggested a new style of outing jacket.

"Pardon me, Mr. Vivian, but have you had an accident, or is that a cut-away for the advanced school?"

"I fear, Miss Ona, it is an accident, pure and simple——"

"And," said Dick, continuing the sentence, "that is just where he needs the repairs."

"How did it all happen?" said Ona, quite interested.

Dick related the whole story in a most graphic manner, embellishing it some by extra touches here and there.

"So," said he, "I suggested that it would be so much better for the rector to stop off here, rather than go through town looking like a toreador returning from a Spanish bull-fight. I knew you'd deem it a privilege, my dear sister, to give Charles a stitch or two, in helping to pull himself together."

"Oh, Dick, you are so embarrassing. Here, let me get at my work. Mr. Vivian, hand me the rolling-pin."

Ona was just a little confused; why, she knew not. Charles said nothing. If he felt at all embarrassed he concealed it by a dignified composure, as he handed her the implement she needed for her pastry—but more for Dick's head, could she have been at liberty to express her feelings by action.

At this juncture, Mrs. Leland appeared and relieved the awful stillness.

"Ah, Charles!" said Mrs. Leland, advancing, "I am glad to see you. What's this I hear about a stitch or two?"

"Look at that coat, and you'll see," said Dick, "and Ona takes very unkindly to my suggestion that——"

The mother's intuition quickly came to intercept any further explanation by Dick, who would not be expected to have any refinement of feeling in such a case, and she said:

"Here, Charles, give me the jacket part."

"And I'll hand you the skirt," said Dick, insisting upon being of service in the matter.

"I have been in embarrassing situations several times to-day," interposed Charles, "and I assure you, my dear Mrs. Leland, that it is not my desire to intrude upon either of you ladies in imposing on you such an unusual task."

"It is a pleasure to be of any service to you, though I admit I am not an expert in the art of reforming a minister's short-comings," replied Mrs. Leland, reassuringly.

"A veritable short-coming in this instance," admitted Charles.

"Ona, I am quite sure that you and Dick can make Charles forget my absence for a few moments, can't you?" said Mrs. Leland. "I'll go to the sewing-room."

Ona's dough had reached in its progress the rolling-pin. The arm movement, in its use, had brought the roses to her cheeks, and Charles could not help being attracted by her beauty, for at that moment she was exceedingly beautiful.

"This is a class of work," said she, "with which I have no familiar acquaintance."

"That you cannot prove by me," said Charles. "I have been watching you, and, though I am devoid of experience, I should imagine you are getting along nicely. Are you working by rule?" meaning the cook-book.

"No, by the rolling-pin. Do you think there is a rule to govern that?"

"That, too, appeals to my ignorance," continued Charles. "I do know, however, that in the hands of one so lovely as you are, it is very innocent; but when wielded in the settlement of domestic arguments, as I have heard sometimes, all rules are disregarded, and, to use a familiar expression, 'knocked into pie.'"

Charles was in his shirt-sleeves, appearing quite democratic, and adding not an unattractive feature to the domestic picture. Dick had left the room.

"You must not mind Dick," said Charles, in an endeavor to defend him. "He is one of the most genial, irrepressible fellows I ever met, and though I try to preserve a certain state of dignity, yet when with him I feel his humor infectious, and I am happy in the unrestraint. No matter what comes of it in the way of censure of me, Dick shall never get the worst of it. I like Dick."

"And I love him," said she. "Brothers and sisters are not in the habit of showing their affection for each other, but, somehow, we have been exceptions in our devotion. I wish I could see in him some ambition. The only talent that reflects any credit upon him is his drawing. His black and white work is most creditable, and some of his pen-and-ink sketches are delightful."

"I did not know of the extent of his talent in that direction," said Charles. "I have seen him dash off with a pencil some of our celebrities, like Sam, the cobbler, Nathan, Davy, and a very clever likeness of Mrs. St. Clair."

"Well, he's very modest about it, and it is only by stealth that we look over his shoulder sometimes, when he is at work. I tell him that art is drifting into the cartoon-school."

"I am glad you advised me of it, as I shall some time talk to him upon the subject."

"I know mother would be pleased if you would," said Ona, who had been steadily engaged as this conversation was carried on. "There, now! The task is done, and the proof of the pie will be in the eating. I promise you that you'll have your share if I have to bring it to you myself."

"The rectory will be but the brighter by your presence, and I know I shall have double pleasure in that pie; the first in knowing that you made it, the second in realizing that you'll play pie-bearer to the rector."

"Oh, Mr. Vivian! I fear you are inclined to be sentimental, like other men," responded Ona. "I'd love to find an exception."

"What would you do then, Ona?" interestedly asked Charles.

"I'd give him two pies," said Ona, gladly thinking of something that would be an answer.

"I always try to be sincere, Ona, and now, with all my other duties, you impose a new one upon me."

"What is that?"

"Striving to win two pies," said Charles.

"You had better try one first, as I do not give a

guarantee with to-day's experiment," Ona answered very promptly.

"I'll take my chances on it," said he.

"And witness a battle between your Christianity, your sense of gallantry, and your digestion," continued Ona. "I'll put you to the test. Now, as I often hear you say in the service, 'Here ends the first Lesson,' " and she closed the cooking-book.

Mrs. Leland now appeared with the coat, which she handed to Charles.

"Here you are!" she said. "I have done the best I could. I know that it will see you home all right, and, what I have started, the tailor can finish."

"I am indeed grateful to you. Is it not ever true, about the 'ill wind that blows no good'? Had it not been for the cow I would not have lost a part of my costume. Had I not been so disarranged, it is very probable that I would not have yielded to the inducement of Dick to enlist your service. And so I am, by your courtesy, initiated into the degree of pastry-making, am guaranteed the possession of half a pie, and am able to take with me the memory of a charming tête-à-tête with the cook."

The conversation was interrupted by the entrance of the maid, who announced May Manning. Mrs. Leland immediately greeted the young visitor and invited her to join them.

"No, I thank you, Mrs. Leland! I am in a bicycle suit, and have come with a message for Mr. Vivian."

Ona and Charles had entered the hall, and, hearing his name, the rector came forward with Ona, who welcomed May.

"Well, May, not another cow, is there?" inquired Charles.

"Not this time; but as I went to place a few flowers on the altar at the church, I found a young couple at the rectory waiting to be married."

"Well," said Charles, "will the events of this day ever cease?"

"What, now?" asked Dick, who had just entered, bringing in a basket of pears he had gathered for Charles.

"May comes to summon me to the rectory to marry a couple," answered Charles.

"Great Scott!" muttered Dick. "What next?"

CHAPTER XIV

HOW CHARACTERS MAY BECOME SAUSAGE MEAT

"WORKING late, Sam, are you not?" asked Dick, who, in passing the cobbler's, was attracted by the light streaming across the garden from the window.

"Still pegging away, Master Dick," said Sam, looking up from his work. "I am glad to see you."

"Yes, and I'll make you still more glad when I tell you I have brought you a basket of fruit from our orchard. I was gathering some for the Reverend Charles to-day, and I thought I might give you a little taste of home-products while they are in season."

"I assure you I'll enjoy your gift very much," said Sam, accepting the basket.

"Come, Sam, put up for to-night! What you earn will not off-set the wear and tear on your eyes."

"Well, I know I am burning the candle pretty low, but I have made a promise to the Rev. Mr. Hoyt, of the Big Church, to let him have these shoes to-night, as he starts for a vacation to-morrow morning. They are finished now, and if you're going that way, and will permit me to walk with you, I'll leave them at the parsonage."

"Good! As I've had quite a busy day in my way," said Dick, "I'll stroll with you as far as the Church and then push on home."

When they reached the Church, the Daughters of

Dorcas were holding a weekly meeting, and a babble of female voices from one of the assembly rooms attracted their attention. They stepped into the vestibule to listen. It was the Sewing Guild, consequently, with machines for stitching, and tables for cutting, there was scattered about here and there material for dresses and underwear. Needles and tongues worked in concert; both were pointed and sharp, and they did their work in the usual way.

"Come to order," said the presiding lady in a peremptory tone, which was immediately obeyed. "Mrs. William Ballston has been proposed for membership. I think she'll be a good member, as her husband is very wealthy, and she is known to be very generous."

Instantly the heads fell together in pairs, trios, and quartettes.

"She's a very nice lady," said Arabella Johnson, the well-known milliner, "but, don't you think, ladies, that as her husband is a broker, we had better go slow in admitting her? The prestige that we wish to establish for the Daughters requires scrutiny in every case."

"She's just as good as some in the Guild now," said Mrs. Stanton, a dressmaker, having in mind the milliner.

"She may be, but I for one would hate to have it said that a broker's wife is a member; I don't know how the others feel about it," said Mrs. Flowers, whose husband was a travelling man.

"Why, just because your husband is a friend and patron of Mr. Ballston?" quickly asked Mrs. Green. "Don't be unjust!"

"Don't get personal, Mrs. Green," said Mrs. Flowers, with a little acidity in her voice.

"I think a lady should not be guilty of betraying confidence," said Mrs. Green, in a manner of quiet rebuke.

"Come, ladies!" said the president. "What have you to say about the vote upon the name of this estimable lady?"

"We have been talking it over," said Mrs. Todd, and have come to the conclusion that Mrs. Ballston's name had better be withdrawn for active membership; but I offer the suggestion that she might be proposed as a contributing member."

"Well, I like that," said Mrs. Van Arsdale, the proposer. "You'll take her money, but you don't want her company. I guess not, ladies. I withdraw the name from any consideration whatever, either good or bad, and it will be many a day before I make another proposition for membership. I bid you good evening!"

Her apron went down, as her ire went up, and she quickly made her exit.

"That's so unchristianlike in her," said Mrs. Flowers to Mrs. Green, their former tilt of words being overlooked. "She knows very well the safeguards we must throw around the social status of our Guild."

"That is true," replied Mrs. Green, threading her needle. "We must look as carefully into the standing of our applicants as I do into the eye of this needle."

"It seems to me," said Mrs. Warner, overhearing the conversation, "that the necessary requisites are, first, an interest in the Church, and secondly, a willingness to engage in Guild work."

"Very true," retorted Mrs. Green, "but the Guild is supposed to be select, and we must draw the line somewhere."

"Draw the line, eh?" said Mrs. Warner. "To my mind it is a very great pity that it wasn't drawn when some of its present membership got in."

These courteous exchanges might have led to unkind feelings on the part of some, had not the breezy and dramatic entrance of Mrs. Helen White caused every eye of the busy coterie to be turned upon her. Mrs. White, a very pretty, self-supporting, and what is usually termed "dashing" widow, was leader among the Daughters, and the weaker of her sex among the members were very willing to be led. Having made it a custom to spend a month or two each year at the great centre of uncoded existence and Bohemianism—New York—to do her shopping, she had just returned with many advanced ideas upon almost every up-to-date subject.

"I am awfully glad to see you, ladies!" said she. "But it is difficult to become reconciled to such a dull place as ours, after a visit to New York, where there's more life in a minute than there is here in a year; once get a taste of it, the weaning process is slow."

"How about Christian work?" asked one of the real old school, having that as the measure of good.

"Oh, that receives some attention, of course, but everybody is too busy to give much time to it. It is the most fascinating place on earth, and if you once get in the swim there, I confess one finds it easy to forget even God."

"I would not want to live there," said another. "I'd be all the time thinking of the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah."

"If you are there, with the life about you, it would be foolish to stop for moralizing; you'd be jostled to death. The procession would run over you. But I

have a great scheme for you—more money in one evening than in all your work for months.”

“What is it?” cried many voices.

“A euchre party,” said Mrs. White.

“Horrors!” said Mrs. Pickett. “It’s gambling, isn’t it?”

“No, not any more than a raffle,” said Mrs. White, “and you’ve taken part in that in the Guild many a time.”

“That’s gambling,” said Mrs. Swift. “My husband says that it is just as much gambling as any other chance game. When you buy a ticket, you bet that your number will win; in a race you bet on a horse. Not much difference, is there?”

“What is her husband’s business?” asked Mrs. Charlton quietly of Mrs. Green.

“He’s called a ‘book-maker,’” innocently responded Mrs. Green.

“A book-maker? I didn’t know he was literary,” answered Mrs. Charlton, with blissful ignorance, as the calling was not explained.

“Gambling or not,” continued Mrs. White, “it is very harmless and a great money-getter. I have known many hundreds to patronize such an entertainment, and, one thing about it, there’s nothing sectarian. Points and prizes are the all-absorbing topics. It is new here and will take, I know. I see no objection in the world to it.”

“What will Mr. Hoyt say?” interposed Mrs. Monroe, thinking that the pastor should be consulted.

“He is going away on a vacation to-morrow, isn’t he?” asked Mrs. White. “He need not know of it until his return, too late to object, and it will be just

the thing to present him with a purse out of the proceeds, to cover his expenses."

"You may do just as you please," said Mrs. Monroe, "but you can count me out, as I don't think the Lord would smile upon it."

"The men will, I know," said Mrs. White. "It will be the means of bringing out all of the old fossils and the very shuffle of the cards will bring back to many of them the familiar sound of years that are gone. Then, too, the prizes!"

"Where will we get those?" asked Mrs. Reynolds, much interested.

"The merchants will donate them," said Mrs. White. "We'll have several begging committees, composed of irresistible young girls, to ask for them, and my friend, Mrs. Sammis, in New York, says that if we have the party, Mr. O'Shaughnissey, a professional manager, will come and manage it for us."

Mrs. White converted the Guild to her way of thinking, so it was decided to hold a Guild euchre party, and the service of all the members of the Daughters of Dorcas was to be enlisted in its success.

Business being concluded, social conversation began again, and there was, as usual, no loss for subjects.

"Did you see Mrs. St. Clair's automobile?" asked Mrs. Remy, whose husband kept the livery stables.

"I notice you accent the *mo* and say *auto-mo-bile*; is that right?" asked Mrs. Fanning.

"I really don't know. What do you call it?" said Mrs. Remy.

"*Au-tom-obile*, accent on the *tom*," said Mrs. Fanning, "is what I've heard it called. What do you say, Mrs. White?"

"Well, really, I have taken so little notice of them that I have never looked it up."

"Well, I am not an authority," said Mrs. Bennett, "but as Mrs. St. Clair flew by me with her buzzing noise, I asked Billy Green, who was just from school, what it was, and he said an *automobilly*. I suppose he knows."

"Did you hear about the wedding this afternoon?" asked Jane Longing, the spinster of the party, jumping off the automobile subject suddenly.

"No," exclaimed many voices, as every eye was turned to her. "Tell us, do!"

"You see," said she, "Laura Mason has been receiving the attentions of Bill Simpson for some time. She knew nothing about him, but consented to the marriage, so they went over to the Rectory of St. Clement's to get Mr. Vivian to perform the ceremony this afternoon, and when Mr. Vivian, for some reason or other, I don't know why, asked the question of Mr. Simpson, if he had been married before, after hesitating, and getting red in the face, he coughed a little and answered 'yes.' Laura nearly fainted with surprise, but when the preacher asked if his wife was still living, and he said 'yes—divorced,' Laura keeled over, and Mr. Vivian said he'd never marry any divorced man, so they brought Laura to, and came and got Mr. Hoyt, our minister, to marry them. Now what do you think of that?"

"That young minister has queer notions," said Mrs. Kearfott.

"And does very queer things," said Mrs. Bronson, who had not been heard during the evening.

"What do you mean?" asked Mrs. White. "I can't

imagine such a charming gentleman being guilty of anything queer."

Some couldn't and some could, of course, as might be expected, yet she continued:

"He was educated in Oxford for the pulpit, so he has many straight-laced ideas about a number of popular things. I like him socially, and I go to hear him preach often. He's not bad, either, but, as is usual with the ministers of his Church, he invariably reads his sermons, and I do hate that above all things in a minister. If Mr. Hoyt did that I think I'd leave his Church and go somewhere else. One thing, though, he does not preach very long."

"Mr. Hoyt does," said Mrs. Green, "and that is a very great fault, even though he is quite eloquent at times."

"What does Mr. Vivian do that's queer, Mrs. Bronson? You started that," said Mrs. Monroe, anxious to hear something derogatory of the young rector.

"Well, I don't know that I ought to tell."

"Oh, yes, do! Don't get our curiosity up to a point and then let it go down," eagerly exclaimed Mrs. Reynolds.

"Well, I heard that he was out with Dick Leland on the race course to-day, and that is enough to ruin his reputation, as 'birds of a feather,' you know," said Mrs. Bronson.

"That is not very damaging," interrupted Mrs. White. "Dick may be wild, but he is a good sort of a fellow, and is up-to-date company all the time. You all know he is generous to a fault, and we never have anything for charity that you do not get a contribution from him. I am going to make him help me with the euchre party."

Dick had become interested, and had taken a seat back of a screen near the door, while he waited for Sam to find Mr. Hoyt at the Parsonage.

"Go on, Mrs. Bronson," said several, in encouraging tones.

"Well, Dick Leland is no saint, everybody knows," she continued.

Dick agreed with this, and anxiously awaited the next onslaught on his character.

"Mr. Vivian," continued Mrs. Bronson, "at the public road house, got in a fight, knocked the proprietor down, nearly killed two men, got his coat torn off, and when he was last seen he was in a rollicking condition with Dick in his buggy, and, worst of all, May Manning was seated on his lap. Beautiful conduct for all of them!"

"Shame on him!" said Mrs. Charlton. "And he a minister of the Church."

"What is May Manning doing in such company, I'd like to know?" exclaimed Mrs. Fanning. "I'll make it my business to tell her Aunt, just as sure as I'm a living being."

"And I'm going to tell Dick's mother about him. I am sure she does not know how he carries on. The devil always finds work for idle hands to do," observed Mrs. Reynolds.

"As for May Manning," remarked Mrs. Flowers, "I think she has enough said about her now, without giving more room for comment; and as for that young upstart who runs St. Clement's, I have very little faith in his Christianity!"

"Do you know him personally, Mrs. Flowers?" inquired Mrs. Killmon.

"No, I do not. I used to see him as a pretty little boy, before he went away."

"Do you know Mr. Leland personally?" asked the same person.

"No, I do not. I know him by sight only, but I have heard that he is into everything that's bad," answered Mrs. Flowers.

"The idea of Mr. Vivian setting up his notions about divorced people, and making a rule not to marry them, is perfectly absurd," said Mrs. Joy, whose husband some time ago had quietly, and without publicity, made her a widow by grace.

"Come, come, ladies!" said Mrs. White. "You surely are not willing to harm good people, are you? Now you may be very wrong in your comments upon Mr. Vivian, and very unjust to the other two."

"What business is it of yours to champion this Episcopalian Rector, who puts himself up in our community as such a paragon, if he is guilty of the conduct of a pugilist and ruffian?" warmly demanded Mrs. Pickett.

"It is my business to defend anybody whom I may believe wronged by gossiping tongues," said Mrs. White, quite aroused. "You are slandering your peers, and I insist that it is beneath the dignity of ladies to act so! I'll believe nothing wrong against Mr. Vivian, Dick, or May, unless it is proved! If Charles Vivian was at the road house, he was there for a purpose. If he was in a fight, it was in defence of right, I know. Just trust me, ladies. I'll find out the truth for you before we are much older."

Dick knew the old adage of eavesdroppers hearing no good of themselves. This he would have overlooked, and quietly stolen away, with his character left

behind him, but he felt it his duty to set Charles right before this uncharitable organization of thoughtless Christian workers, who in their efforts to clothe the naked, also laid bare the reputations of friends and foes alike in the community without even a winding sheet of protection, which out of their hearts, however cold, might have been spread around to shield them from the blasts of chilling breaths fanned by idle tongues. So he reasoned and debated, until the president, having caused the books to be distributed, said:

"Now, we'll close by singing together those beautiful sentiments—

"Come, gentle peace and love's good-will,
Thy missions to fulfil!"

Dick decided. He pushed down the screen, which so startled some of the ladies that they had a little scream.

"Pardon this intrusion, ladies!" said he.

"How dare you, sir, interrupt our closing?"

"Permit me just a moment to explain why I am more audacious than you have ever known me to be, and why I crave a moment of your time."

"No," said Mrs. White, "he's the very person I wished for, and it's just to hear his explanation."

"Well, let him go on with it and get out as quick as he can," said Mrs. Reynolds, very ungraciously.

"Go on, Mr. Leland," said Mrs. White kindly. "I am anxious to hear you, and the ladies will extend to you the courtesy of the floor, as we say in our meetings."

"Ladies!" said Dick, "I do not care how you have used my name and traduced me. This is unworthy of you, but when you have so wronged my friend and

yours, for there is nothing you'd ask of him that he would not cheerfully do, then I feel compelled to say that your imputations against the Rev. Charles Vivian, of St. Clement's Church, are lying slanders! He went to the road house, and in the presence of a cowardly crowd, resented the insult to a wife seeking to rescue a drunken husband. The torn coat was the result of saving May Manning's life, almost at the sacrifice of his own. The comment on the homeward coming is not worthy of notice. I give you the truth! One of your estimable members kindly wished it."

There is no telling how far the indignant young man would have gone but for the fact that a hymn-book whizzed by his head. Dick thereupon made a graceful, but hasty retreat, saying as he went out:

"Thanks, ladies, for passing the books! I do not care to sing."

CHAPTER XV

A RECEPTION AT THE RECTORY

THE rectory of St. Clement's, which was in the shadow of the Church, was plain and substantial, and was a model of comfort. Flower boxes adorned each window sill, and from these hung vines and fuschia plants, which seemed to spring from banks of red geraniums. The walls were covered with ivy.

A spacious study, well stocked with books, contained several choice pieces of statuary, classical pictures, and bric-à-brac. In a bow-window was a desk, beside which was a revolving case filled with books of reference more frequently in use.

The morning following the series of adventures which we have described, Charles was engaged in his study. The maid-of-all-work was polishing the knob of the front door when George Vivian came up the walk.

"Good morning, Mary!" said the visitor. "Is that rector brother of mine in?"

"Yes, sir," answered the maid.

"Alone, is he?"

"Yes, sir. Just walk in."

And she opened the door.

"An early caller, and a welcome one," said Charles, as George entered the study.

"I thought I'd run over to see how you get on in your new home—all alone," George replied. "It's

queer without you at 'The Oaks.' I miss you very much, and I'm sure father does, too. Mrs. Vivian says very little upon the subject, but she thinks well of you, Charles. I'm the fellow she'd rather have out of the way. However, she exhibited a very contrite spirit this week and came to seek forgiveness for her conduct lately."

"Well, George, you must meet her in the same spirit, and prove yourself always the liberal, good fellow you are. Mrs. Vivian and I are excellent friends, I am glad to say, and she takes extraordinary interest in me and my work in the Church, so I can overlook her peculiarities, and appreciate her kindness. I confess, though, she is very variable. I never trust myself to depend too much upon her co-operation in any of our work, as I am apt to be disappointed. She possesses an unfortunate jealous disposition—jealous of everything and everybody. If her wish prevails, she is enthusiasm itself, so I have really become quite diplomatic in all my relations with her."

"Well, you manage her over here, and I'll undertake the task over there—for father's sake," said George. "Now, tell me, how do you like your bachelor-life?"

"I am so busy I hardly have time to think of it. I have a butler and housemaid, who looks also after the cooking. My secretary has no reason to complain of being at all idle during the hours she is at work—about two each day."

"From the various incidents I have heard related, I infer that yesterday was your busy day. Sam told me just now, as I passed, that if I'd say 'Pass the hymn-book!' to Dick, he'd dodge his head and run."

"How is that?" said Charles. "I did not hear of

any further experience that Dick had yesterday. I thought when he left me that he had enough for one day."

"I guess he thought so, too, but he accidentally got into the sewing guild last night, and when they went for you without gloves, he opened up from behind a screen in your defence, until he said to them 'Shame on you!' In an instant he had books enough flying around him to start a free library. Dick was serious in his intentions, but the denouement was very ludicrous."

"I appreciate it all the more," said Charles. "He is truly a most loyal friend. It is none of my business to meddle in any man's daily pursuits, yet I wish Dick had something to do. It seems unmanly for so active a fellow to be idle, as far as steady occupation is concerned. His modesty would never let anybody know how skilled he is with the brush and crayon, pen and pencil. From some of his work I have seen, I should pronounce him a coming Doré."

"He must have cultivated it while we were away," said George, "though I do remember, at early school, he was always caricaturing the teacher, with his grimaces and distortions. I am going to push Dick up to branching out, and he may surprise us all yet. By the way, Charles, I have concluded to put up my shingle and start the law. I have already been admitted to practice, you know, and I think I'll go out to see if old Mrs. Green will permit me to make a case for damages against you, for misleading her cow into a haystack and causing it to give up its life for too much hay."

"You'd lose your case, sure," said Charles, "as there was contributory negligence on the part of the cow, in

not looking out for obstructions. I am glad, however, of your determination about the profession, for I feared the stage would surely get you."

"Now don't wager on that, as it may get me yet," answered George. "Oh, Charles, I learned, too, that you stood out against a bunch of the long greens yesterday and refused to marry a couple because the man had been divorced. Now, is that so?"

"Yes, it is," said Charles.

"Well, I am surprised and not surprised," said George, paradoxically expressing himself. "Yet I confess I ought not to be surprised at anything you do. Why do you hold out, when your canon makers are afraid to sustain you?"

"I have a right to think for myself, I judge, and when I think I'm right, the rest of the world can't move me."

"I well know that, but there are a number of things in which you are progressive, in fact, far ahead of the times, and others in which you have not yet reached the popular standard, and I do hope some day to see your eyes opened."

"George, this is a sacred thing with me, and I can view marriage in no other light than as a holy relation created by God. It is a solemn contract sanctioned by the Church, and as a minister I must ratify and maintain the contract I am instrumental in making. The civil law must not interfere with Church law."

"What becomes of the lawyer, and his relationship to the subject?"

"Purely civil, or uncivil, I may say, for him to be professionally considered in the matter. The sacred

law, 'whomsoever God hath joined, let no man put asunder,' is my code and none other shall guide me."

"If a lawyer would take it upon himself to moralize, he'd lose the job and his neighbor would get it. When a sweetly sad young woman, with very pretty eyes, and a soft voice, asked, 'Do you get divorces?' I said, 'Do undertakers bury the dead? I with the same degree of sentiment will engage in such an undertaking.' So, my dear Charles, that expresses it all, so far as I am concerned."

"Well, George, I'll keep on marrying—you separating—thus we are very much apart on divorce."

"Yes," responded George, "and so are those who want them. Well, I'll leave you. I am going to walk out to Davy Burton's to watch Nathan awhile. He's a study, and I am growing very much interested in him. In his intervals of lucidity, he is not such a fool as we take him. There are two problems over at that pretty suburban home, which I'd like to solve."

"What are those?"

"Nathan and Davy."

"Why those two individuals?"

"I believe Nathan has a past filled with interest, and Davy has something in common with father, though I have not the slightest idea what it is. Davy is a perfect clam. I'd like to have such a confidant. I could trust him implicitly."

When George had gone, Charles resumed the preparation of his sermon. So absorbed was he that he failed to hear the approach of Ona Leland.

"Here's your pie," interrupted Ona, who, having crossed the floor to his desk, had now placed her gift on his manuscript.

"Oh, Miss Ona, I'm delighted! This is indeed a surprise!"

"Having tested our culinary accomplishment of yesterday at home," said she, with considerable self-possession, "and realizing no serious results as yet, I have kept my promise to share with you this sample, and I know you'll say that it will be enjoyed all the more because I brought it myself."

"That is true. How could you divine what I would say?"

"Men are all the same. They often mistake flattery for gallantry—it is second nature in them; and I am willing to believe you no exception."

"It would be a very sad state of affairs if nobody could be believed—if all sincerity should be doubted. Where is Dick this morning?"

"He said he would take a spin down the road, to explain the disaster to the cow of old Mrs. Green, so he'll be in after a while, no doubt, with something new. It is strange that so worldly a fellow as Dick can find you so congenial."

"That is what I call honesty," said Charles, smiling.

"Now you understand just what I mean, so you need not smile. You're a Churchman; Dick is only——"

"Your brother," said Charles, interrupting.

"Now don't cut me off like that! I mean only a layman, but he's very fond of you, and you seem to be fond of him."

"Break away there!" cried a merry voice, and Dick, followed by George, entered the study.

"Luncheon is served, sir," said Mary, who also appeared at this moment.

"Come into the dining-room, my friends," said the

rector. "You boys are just in time, and I'll escort Miss Ona, as the guest of honor, because we are to test——"

"Her pie," said Dick, who knew that she had come to the rectory for the purpose of bringing it.

CHAPTER XVI

A MYSTERIOUS CORRESPONDENT

ELEANOR ST. CLAIR was entirely oblivious of the attention she attracted as she autotobiled along the thoroughfare, turning to the right or left with the dexterity of a skilled chauffeur, making dangerously close passings, grazing projecting hubs, and startling horses which had never been known to shy.

Her pretty face, under a rich hat, and an exquisite form in a stylish gown, always compelled admiration. There was no greater favorite in the community than this prepossessing Eleanor St. Clair, whose independent manner made her utterly regardless of criticism.

She married wealth—and age. Mr. St. Clair was an indulgent husband. At home he found his books genial companions; at the club, were his fellow-townsmen with whom he found much in common.

As she was passing the Court House, who should be coming out but George Vivian.

"Come, George, let me give you a turn," Mrs. St. Clair cried.

"I am quite at your service," George replied.
"Whither thou goest I will go."

"I am going to the rectory for a moment, to see your brother."

"Indeed!"

"There's a little bit of unpleasant work going on, I fear, and I want aid in stopping it."

"What is it? Does it interest him?"

"Well, I think it does. I think it interests everybody in his parish—everybody in the community, in fact."

"What is the nature of it?"

"Why, it is a case of anonymous letter-writing, which really should be beneath notice, but I'm going to try to trace this piece of diabolical work to its author."

"Do you suspect anybody?"

"Not in the least, and that is why I want to see Charles."

"What is the method adopted?"

"A postal—hand-printed—Scripture verse. It is evidently from some one keeping close tab on me, as I must confess it is exceedingly *apropos*. Here it is," said she, handing him a card, "though I did not intend it for any other eye than Charles's, but I'll consider you my lawyer, and every individual has a right to confide in his lawyer, and his minister. Now look at that effort to disguise. It's like a primary-school boy, mingling the Roman capitals and script letters, isn't it?"

"Yes," said George, studying it a moment. "It will be hard to compare with genuine writing. Let me see if I think there is so much truth in your compliment. *'They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures. Ps. xxxvi, 8.'* Excellent! Hello, there's Dick! Let's see what he says about it."

Dick was just coming out of Sam's gate, and they halted to greet him.

"Dick," said Mrs. St. Clair, "I am awfully glad to see you. Let me give you a ride in my new auto."

"I am happy always to be with you," said Dick, "but in this novel turnout I shall be doubly so. Which way?"

"To the rectory," said she.

"To see Charles? Well, you'll find him there, as he left me only a short time ago at Sam's."

"Dick," said George, who had been studying the card, "what do you think of this sentiment to our dear friend here?" reading the card.

"Psalms, is it?" said Dick. "Who wrote the Psalms? David, didn't he?"

"But you are not the only object of your unknown correspondent's attention."

Dick thrust a hand into one of his pockets and produced a postal card, which, by comparison, proved to be in the same handwriting.

"I seem to be known, too, as the sentiment evidently is intended to apply to the receiver," Dick added.

"What is yours?" asked George. "Let me see. *'He deviseth mischief upon his bed, he setteth himself in a way that is not good. Ps. xxxvi, 4.'*"

"I don't know why I kept the card," said Dick. "Anonymous communications should be treated with the contempt they deserve."

"I thought the same thing," said George, bringing forth a card also, "as I put mine in my pocket, and but for the fact of this exhibition of these unique specimens, I should have kept it very dark, so that the sender should have no satisfaction in knowing that it had ever been received."

"Now maybe that would be the better way to treat the whole subject," remarked Dick.

"Come, George, don't hide your expression of the

esteem in which you are held by others," laughed Mrs. St. Clair. "Out with it. Hand over the card."

"Here, George, give it to me," said Dick, taking it and glancing over it before reading. "Not so bad. The writer knows you, too. How about this, Eleanor? *'I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Ps. xxxvi.'*"

"May Manning!" exclaimed George, seeing her approaching.

"Where?" asked Dick.

"Coming out of the Seminary grounds."

"We'll take her in," said Mrs. St. Clair. "I know she'll enjoy the ride."

Driving up in front of the gate, Mrs. St. Clair hailed May.

"Come, May, I know these young gentlemen will be pleased to have you join us, and I'll be happy if you will do so."

"I will, indeed, Mrs. St. Clair," replied May, as her face brightened with pleasure. "It will be my first ride in an automobile."

"George, make room for her on the back seat with you," said Mrs. St. Clair. "Dick, help her up."

"I am glad you have returned. I really missed you," said May, as soon as she was seated. Then, turning to George, she said, innocently: "I have a joke on you."

"A joke on me—eh? I'd like to hear it."

"Wait a moment, and I'll find it. I put it in my book. See what I received in the mail to-day—this postal"—showing a card that had on the now familiar script. "I thought at first it was some boy at school, but the first part seems to be from the Bible, and that is not such an overstudied book at the Seminary."

"Oh!" said Mrs. St. Clair. "Another! Well, it makes the fight stronger. We gather recruits as we move along."

"Now for the joke," said George.

"Well, let me read it," said May. "*'Wherewithal shall a young man obstruct his way. Ps. xxxvi. May Manning beware! George Vivian is the young man—you obstruct him.'* Now, Mr. Vivian, you'll have to explain. Am I really big enough to obstruct?"

"Well, May," said Mrs. St. Clair, seriously, "all of us have received missives of that nature, and we are going now to the rectory to confer with Mr. Vivian about them."

Charles was in his study. They went in without ceremony and were received with the same kindly greeting as if he had been expecting them.

"We have come to bring you these," said George, who held out the four postal cards.

"What do they mean?" the rector asked, after reading them.

"Do you know the writing?" asked George.

"Do you call that writing?" laughed Charles.

"Well, printing, then," answered George.

"This seems to be a general anonymous visitation day," said Charles. "There are others who have been favored besides yourselves. Mr. Thornton, our warden, was not in the best of humor when he came in to tell me that he had been grossly insulted. He handed me this postal card addressed to him, from which I read, '*Why don't you resign?—You're too old for even the Lord to remove.*' Miss Letitia Youngblood got one that read: '*If you could separate your money from yourself, I know several men who would marry it.*' I appeased her wrath all right."

"Any more?" asked Dick, cheerfully.

"Yes," said Charles. "Miriam Everly, our soprano, had a postal propounding this query: '*There's nothing in your voice to admire. Why don't you join the invisible choir?*' This is all very amusing, but very serious business, I fear."

"Well, we are going to trace it to the source and break it up," said George. "We'll start with the premises that its origin is in your congregation."

"Yes," said Dick, "and it is somebody pretty well informed concerning the peculiarities of individuals. Where are you going to begin, George?"

"Here!" answered George, immediately. "Charles, have you samples of the handwriting of your parishioners?"

"Is it the work of a man or woman?" asked Charles.

"A woman," said Mrs. St. Clair. "Men wouldn't do those things."

"Why not?" asked Dick. "I have known some men to be mean enough to do anything," said Dick.

"None in this community," returned Mrs. St. Clair. "They are all too busy. It takes time to think up these things."

"Well, here is a bundle of applications to the Woman's Auxiliary," said Charles.

"Let me have them, and give me also all of those precious cards," said George.

"What are you going to do?" asked Charles.

"I am going to take them to Pennington," he answered.

"Do," said Mrs. St. Clair. "I never thought of that. He's an expert. Come, we'll all go with you."

"I had better take no active part in it," said Charles, "but will be very much interested in your success."

"Good-bye, then," said George, as he helped May into the automobile and seated himself beside her. Dick then resumed his place beside Mrs. St. Clair. "We go to solve the mystery."

The power was on, and off they went.

CHAPTER XVII

A CASE FOR AN EXPERT

PAUL PENNINGTON lived near the Seminary, in an attractive home. The laboratory was apart from the dwelling, and here midnight oil was burned and mysteries were solved. The walls were hung with many specimens of handwriting and charts illustrating scientific experiments.

Chasing a butterfly now, Paul saw nothing but the flitting of its variegated wings, as he followed it from bush to bush toward the gate, at which stood the automobile with its quartette of callers.

"Go it, Paul," cried Dick. "Catch the butterfly, then we'll catch you, for we have something in your line, as interesting as Bugology."

"There! I have him, and what a beauty!" said Paul, enthusiastically. "Welcome, all of you. You know you are always at home when at 'Rest Easy.' Mr. Vivian, you keep yourself so much in the 'Vanity Fair' part of town that I seldom have this pleasure. Dick, I cannot complain of you."

"Paul," said George, "we have a chirographical mystery for you to unravel. Who is the sender of these postcards?"

As soon as Paul saw them, he started a little.

"Why, this is quite a coincidence!" he exclaimed. "I have received one also, and already I have given it some study. You see it is part script and part printed Roman capitals, poorly made. It will be

necessary, perhaps, to have the writings of many persons, in order to get the means of comparison."

"What compliment was paid to you?" asked Dick.

"Really, I was so much absorbed in the work," answered Paul, "that I was not sufficiently impressed with the sentiment to remember it. However, if you'd like to see it I'll find it for you; but do let me invite you to get out and accept the hospitality of my home. There'll be no danger of the horses running away if left alone."

"Thank you!" said Mrs. St. Clair. "We'll not go in now, as our purpose when we started was to enjoy a ride out the Pike, but we have been intercepted by the U. S. Mail, which always takes precedence."

"Well, I'll not detain you a moment," said Paul. "I'll run in and get my contribution."

It did not take very long, and his return brought one more incident as a part of the written chapter already in hand.

"Here it is," said he. Then he began reading from the card, "*Thy tongue is the pen of a ready writer. Its work would be safe with the expert, so put away the microscope and turn your eye to May Manning.*"

"Do I need your watching?" asked May, who had not intruded very many utterances into the conversation.

"Indeed, you do not, and I think it a very unnecessary piece of business that any one should single you out from our many students," said Paul.

"Well, we want to know who wrote the cards," said George. "Our community is too small to harbor such a coward and not afford us some means to find out who it is."

"Well, Mr. Vivian, I'll do my best."

CHAPTER XVIII

A FAIR SAMARITAN

As Mrs. St. Clair's automobile turned into Vivian Park, Mrs. St. Clair, being reminded of her last pleasant visit to the Home, turned to May.

"What has become of your young man, May?" she asked.

"What, a young man here in whom you are interested!" said George.

"Well, he's not my young man," said May shyly, "but one from mother."

"Is he here now?"

"Yes, convalescing. I have seen him often and kept fresh flowers by his bed. He's better now and can talk. I love to hear him talk of mother."

"Did I tell you I saw her when I was in New York?" inquired Mrs. St. Clair.

"Did you?" exclaimed May eagerly.

"Yes, I saw the play, and while I do not fancy the subject, yet it is very strong, and she rises to superb heights in it."

"What did you think of her?" May asked.

"She's beautiful. I fell in love with her myself, and seeing her so patient, so wronged, so forbearing, I just wanted to rush upon the stage and tear off the 'Scarlet letter.'"

"What an actress you'd be," said Dick. "I'd like to see you in the part."

"One must feel it to play it," said Eleanor.

"Yes, then she becomes the true actress," said George. "May, you'll make a good one, and, as I have often thought, I'll give you a chance to try."

"I'd love to do so," acquiesced May.

"It strikes me that this amphitheatre of nature in these woods would be just the place, and we could put on 'As You Like It'—you playing 'Rosalind'—or 'Ingomar'—you playing 'Parthenia.'"

"Oh! A grand idea!" exclaimed Mrs. St. Clair. "We could give the receipts to the hospital."

"I'm willing," replied May. "But who can you get to play? Who'll be 'Ingomar'?"

"I will," said George.

"Then I'll be 'Parthenia' gladly if I can," said May. "And who'll be 'Orlando'?"

"I will," said George.

"Then I'll be 'Rosalind,'" said she.

"That settles it as far as you are concerned," said Dick, "but what becomes of Mrs. St. Clair and myself?"

"You'll be cast all right, have no fears; we'll need everybody with talent, and, as in the play of 'Ober-Ammergau,' we'll have all the peasants of the village studying a part."

"Well, George," said Mrs. St. Clair, "consider yourself a committee of one to confer with Dick and arrange for the matter, and I shall be glad to have the committee meet at my home. May, if you inherit your mother's ability, I am sure of you."

"I am fond of it, I admit, and I possess quick study and good memory."

"Do you see your mother often?"

"No, I do not. When I was a little girl I went with

her to many places, but now that I am grown older she prefers that I should remain here and attend school."

"Not ashamed of you, surely," said Mrs. St. Clair, sincerely but thoughtlessly.

"I'd love dearly to be with my mother," May went on, "but I have heard her say many times, 'Not the stage, daughter, not the stage!' So she has kept me as far from it as possible."

"Well, she is making for herself a name," said Mrs. St. Clair, "and you'll be very proud of her. I'd love to know her real well. When will she come to see you again?"

"When the season is over. She generally comes here to rest, but heretofore she has always been such a recluse that she has not cultivated the friendships I should like. She knows Dick, as he has been at home in summer, but she hasn't seen Mr. Vivian since he was a boy. She has told me about the Vivian boys as tots when she first came here."

"She loves you, I know," said George, very much interested in this little family history.

"I never doubt her love for me, nor her solicitude for my welfare, but"—she paused, as if in doubt as to how far she should discuss her affairs—"she never confides in me. I have her love, I know—her heart is overflowing with it—but what I most desire is her confidence."

Along the road Mrs. St. Clair's automobile disturbed the composure of a spanking pair of bays drawing a Victoria, containing another fair candidate for admiration honors—Helen White, the charity scheme promoter. As soon as she recognized the party, she bade her coachman stop, and Mrs. St. Clair moved

along beside the carriage and put down brakes, for a road tête-à-tête.

"You are just the people I want to see. My Guild Euchre is flourishing, and I want you all to come. The tickets are going like hot cakes, and really one would think that I had opened a pool room. Ah, Dick Leland, you great fellow! You came near breaking up the meeting the other night. You were all right, though. You had no business to be listening, but they had no business to be slandering innocent people."

"Well, Helen," said Mrs. St. Clair, the first to answer, "you almost took my breath, and I judge I speak for the rest. When is the Euchre? I'll take five tickets. These will be for us, and, Dick, you'll invite Ona."

"Oh, thank you, Mrs. St. Clair! All for charity, you know. You are the kindest thing in the world always. I think you will enjoy it. May, how are you? Shall I see you there?"

"I'm afraid not, Mrs. White. I am not what is called 'out' yet."

"I'll have her make an exception in this case, as it is a church affair," said George, "and I'll explain it to her aunt. When is it?"

"Next week. Don't disappoint me. Dick, you promised to help me, and I am going to depend upon you."

"Yes, but that was before I was in disgrace in your Guild," said Dick.

"Come and help me; that will show your Christian spirit and shame some of our old ladies. Oh, I forgot to say that Prof. O'Shaughnissey has accepted and will manage for us. Good-bye!"

CHAPTER XIX

TWO VIEWS OF FRATERNITIES

"I KNOW of no more trying position to occupy than for a young theologian to be made rector of the Church in the town in which he has been reared," remarked George to Charles Vivian, as they sat watching Sam work upon a shoe, for which Charles was waiting.

"Why is that, George?" asked Charles, being really desirous of having his position defined.

"Well, it is the old prophet idea. The people have seen you grow. They never forget your pinafore or close their eyes to your kilts. Your mind is preserved in alcohol, a constant state of preservation; it knows no development, it sees no disintegration. 'Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings God hath perfected praise.' To this they agree, but when the babe becomes the teacher, like the Master, and the boy, the man, he must shut out the past, and become a 'cultivated taste' before his presence can awe and his power can inspire. There is the greatest difficulty in jumping from 'Charles' to 'Mr.,' and from 'My dear Vivian' to 'The Reverend Sir.'"

"Well, George, I guess I must agree with you this time, and admit there is some truth in what you say. I find myself, on the other hand, really forgetting the dignity that belongs to my position, and relishing visits to some of the old childhood's haunts, filled as they were with pranks and pleasures we enjoyed to-

gether. I love to sit here with Sam, and I wish to assure him that nothing shall change my fondness for this old cobbler shop, where I have received some of the most practical lessons of life."

"What are those, Mr. Charles?" asked Sam.

"A graceful submission to Fate. The union of pleasure and labor. A like disposition to all. Industry, patience, temperance, forbearance, and kindness, all these things I have learned from this dear old man, who has put many a copper toe on my little shoes, who made my first red top-boots, a proud event for me then, and who is now straining his eyes and spending some of his strength in drawing his wax ends through stubborn leather, that I may rejoice therein. My profession must not be an oppressive one to my old friends. Irrespective of denomination, I want them to regard me with favor and affection. I have a duty the Church marks out for me; I propose to do that conscientiously."

"No one can blame you for that, Mr. Charles," said Sam, emphasizing his assertion by flattening out a piece of leather with his hammer upon the bottom of a flat-iron, which had been in use ever since the memory of these Vivian boys could recall any of the implements of the cobbler's art. "I have always made it a rule to do my duty in my line to insure patronage, and you must do the same thing, Mr. Charles."

"To insure patronage, Sam?" facetiously asked George.

"Well, not exactly that, George. Of course Mr. Charles will understand me; I always respect the cloth, and he commands it from everybody."

"Yes, but he lays himself out for much criticism, Sam, by his crusading ideas. I could not but notice,

in his course of sermons to young men, that he pays his respects to many popular ideas, some very near to me, I am willing to admit."

"Maybe you're just the one at whom I am aiming," observed Charles quizzically.

"Well, I tell you it looks very much like it. I am a fraternity man, have always been, and the way you play the changes upon the various organizations has not proved an impressionless effort. I'll convince you some day of the error of your way, and prove to you that the foundation of all the fraternities of which I know is such that they become a very companionable help-mate for the Church."

"In what regard?" inquired Charles.

"In practical work," answered George.

"Practical work, eh?" repeated Charles slowly, in a doubtful tone.

"Yes—'going about doing good'—the Master's work!" answered George, feeling that he could, by no better reply, close the subject.

"I hear you have joined the Elks—this new Order?"

"Yes—the great American fraternity. It stands for charity, benevolence, and citizenship."

"Well, I'll not discuss it," said Charles. "My impressions are quite the reverse."

"Because you do not know, and you don't evince a desire to ascertain. Have you ever studied the plan of the Home in the Park, which father gave to it?"

"No."

"That's just it—condemnation first, trial afterwards. I'll convert you yet, mind what I say. Are you a Mason?" asked George, turning to Sam.

"I am, and have been for forty years. Your good

father, Mr. Charles, and myself have travelled together in that great institution."

"Has it ever done you any good?" asked Charles. "I have yet to hear of any benefit growing out of that ancient institution. It buries the dead, I know, but what does it do for the living? Forty years, Sam! What have you to show for it?"

"Well, Mr. Charles, I'm not that selfish that I measure good to all by my share of it. Besides, we never discuss the subject with the outside world, do we, George?" asked Sam, glad to be able to appeal to George, whom he knew to be a member of the fraternity.

"Well, all I have to say is this, if you could read this book upon the subject, you'd no longer blame me for making it a theme in my crusades, as George has been pleased to term them," said Charles, as he brought forth a handy volume from his pocket.

"What is it?" asked George.

"It is 'Ino Cryptis Hadesiana.' I am translating it from the French, and it is an exposé that should turn the Church, the State, and the people, to detest Masonry as the vilest of institutions."

"Let us hear some of it, and, even if it is true, we'll promise not to tell you. Don't we, Sam? Ah, here comes Dick! You are in good time, Dick—always in luck. Charles is going to entertain us with a wonderful exposé of the Craft by Crypti, a French apostate."

"I'll be very glad to hear it, as nothing pleases me better than when I am clearing up a mystery, showing up an impostor, or exposing a fake," said Dick, falling in with Charles's ideas exactly, and giving a wink to George.

"There, I saw that," said Charles.

"Saw what?" asked Dick.

"That wink to George. You fellows cannot make me believe but that by winks and signals you have a means of communication with each other."

"Well, let it go at that," said Dick. "We'll tell you about them some time, and, like us, you'll be clothed with that supernatural power of knowing a brother in the dark as well as in the light. Go on with the book. Is it weird and gruesome? If so, I shall be delighted. That is what I want."

"Of course, I can give you but an idea. Ino is the most renowned writer of all the world upon the subject. Having been initiated into the mysteries of Masonry, and so shocked by its inhumanity, he felt it his duty to expose it."

"The villain!" said Dick. "And violate his obligation? The shades of Morgan oppress him."

"You forget, an obligation with a mental reservation can be kept as far as the intention prevails," said Charles.

"Come, now, don't be bigoted in this matter and make an excuse for this fellow," said Dick. "He violated his obligation if you accept his narration as truth. You should say, as all sincere thinkers should, once deceived, never believed. He had a most useful accomplice in Dr. Ezekiel, who gained access to secrets in various parts of his own and in foreign lands, but, strange as it may seem, he enlisted the services of a very handsome English girl, Mona Monon, an adventuress, of course, but marvelously adapted for the work, especially in English-speaking countries.

"From his own work I translate as literally as possible, though it is difficult, as there are so many idioms

in the French language. 'The novice was clothed in a cloth of luminous material, which in the darkness that ever and anon prevailed, made him, while not a brilliant object, so bright as to shed around about him a glow that caused the marble figures, cavernous walls, and stalactyte hangings to stand out as if the sculptor's chisel had done its work. He entered, seated in a chariot made of human skulls, drawn by scores of scorpions of extraordinary size.

"The wheels were tired with curving ribs, and the spokes were the great bones of the leg, radiating from the thigh which made the hub. The way was paved with hundreds of craniums. Weird sounds of the sighing of the winds of tribulation and anguish could be heard, while air-waves, set in motion by the clashing of gongs, were intercepted by the mournful cries of distress, like the wail that might have come from the abode of lost souls. Living skeletons moved on either side of the slowly progressing car. A human heart, warm with the life blood of the candidate who, preceding, had failed in his crossing of the Styx, was placed in his left hand, and the sound of its drippings, in the oppressive stillness, produced a creeping sensation that could be equalled only by the dissolution chill of death.

"In his right hand were reins made of the spun fibres of human skin. Resting at a fountain of blood, his thirst was quenched, and the novice was reminded by a white-heated brand pressed against his breast over his heart that the sign thereon imprinted amid the agony of the moment was to be lasting as all the impressions of the solemn ceremony in which he was about to engage. He had been warned that any cry or any shrinking meant annihilation, so pain was

never to be made manifest, no matter how monstrous or direfully cruel the infliction. Being permitted to see the chamber in which his first introduction had been made, he beheld the Inquisition of the Devils, as stately and rigid they sat, Demon-attired, with eyes of fire glaring from every socket, upon the being, giving forth the light, by which they could be discerned in their grotesque groupings.

“When, in strains profunda, he was reminded of the fate of the faithless, hissing issued from devices in streams of fire which darted forth as so many streaks of forked lightning and played upon him, until the incense of sulphuric fumes filled the space around and completely enveloped him. The choir chanted in sepulchral tones:

“Oil of venom, vile to thy taste—
Beware; Oh, Beware!
Shall quench thy burning thirst in haste;
Beware; Oh, Beware!
Hot seering of thy balls of sight,
Beware; Oh, Beware!
Shall make for thee eternal night,
Beware; Oh, Beware!
Wails of agony fill thy ear;
Beware; Oh, Beware!
Death shall keep thee in constant fear,
Beware; Oh, Beware!
Gaping wounds which know no healing,
Beware; Oh, Beware!
Pain and torture shall test thy feeling,
Beware; Oh, Beware!
Should thou faithless be!
Beware! Beware! Beware!

“A feeble groan emanated from the victim. There was no flinching. Once resolved, there was no step backward. Released from the uncanny seat, he stood upon a dais, which, without warning, opened and let him down into the depths of Hell, as near as human

minds could conceive it and man's ingenuity could make it. Fear at last overcame his courage, and he cried out: "Murder! Murder! Murder!"

"Pretty rough treatment," said George. "Any one having the courage to try it deserves a medal for bravery."

"Well I should think so," said Dick. "Sam, show us your mark."

"Well, you know we are so bound to secrecy that I can't show it," said Sam. "I tell you, boys, if I had any hair left on top it would have stood up while Mr. Charles was reading."

"What memories that brought back to me, George," said Dick, touching him on the foot. "Is anybody true? We are in a dilemma, Charles, and you are the cause."

"I am sorry," responded Charles. "How am I the cause?"

"If we admit all this, we'll be as bad as Crypti; if we deny it, you'll strengthen your belief that there is something of truth in it. So it's best to submit the matter without argument, eh, George?" said Dick.

"There is nothing left for us to do," responded George. Then, turning to his brother, "Now, Charles, as a Christian man, strong mentally, college bred, and in civilized times, such as these, can you really be so credulous as to believe for one moment that there was ever any semblance of truth in that so-called exposé."

"Well, I confess it seems very inhuman, and very unreasonable, that men should engage in such practices upon their fellow-beings; but I am reading the work of an acknowledged and recognized authority. It has reached its hundred thousandth issue, and even though it is exaggerated, may I not use the trite say-

ing, 'where there's so much smoke, there must be some fire' ? Therefore, I gather from it that they must be guilty of absurd, undignified, and nefarious usages."

"Now, in all seriousness, Charles," resumed George, "could you suspect your own father, or even this dear old Sam here, of being engaged in anything unmanly or nefarious?"

"I don't know what they might have done when younger. There is a recklessness about youth that knows no bounds. But let me read on, I have not yet made my case. You shall have the closing, my rising young lawyer.

" 'Dr. Ezekiel underwent many things personally and has immortalized himself in his works, and in confidence he received the following statement concerning a part of the Ceremony of Initiation. Before a man is admitted to the high degrees, he's blindfolded and taken into a room where a live sheep is lying on the floor. The animal's mouth and feet are secured, and it is clean shaven, so that its skin feels to the touch like that of a human being.

" 'Next to the animal is placed a man, who breathes heavily, feigning to struggle against imaginary enemies. The candidate is given to understand that the sheep's body is that of a disloyal member who revealed the secrets of the Order and must die, according to some ancient law, the candidate being made executioner, as a warning to him. Then he is given a big knife, and after some ceremonial is persuaded to kill the traitor, that is, plunge the knife repeatedly into the body of the sheep, which he imagines to be that of a human being. Thus, every Mason is a murderer, in spirit at least, if not actually.' "

"And you believe that, Charles?" inquired George.

"No, I do not say I believe any of it, but it is strange that it should so long remain unanswered."

"Any more?" asked Dick. "It looks as if we are done for, George. I did think our secrets were safe, but from all this, we might have admitted women in the beginning, it could not have been any worse."

"I believe it would have been much better," said Sam, "for their presence would have refuted the idea of such conduct, and given to it the lie at the outset."

"That's so," enthusiastically replied George. "I wonder those corner-stone layers did not think that probably the charm of woman might have a refining influence on the Order."

"Well, you know why they didn't, don't you?" remarked Dick. "I'll tell you. Our colored man was at work in the kitchen yesterday, and there was some celebration on. Mother asked him if he belonged to the Masons. 'Oh, yaas, Ma'am,' said he. 'Erastus, I have often wondered why women do not join.' 'Wall, Miss Leland, I tells you I reckon 'tis 'cause dey ain't 'telligent 'nuff.' The examination in chief closed, and mother sat down in a back seat."

"Go on, Charles," said George. "I am anxious to hear about the escapades of Mona. What did she do?"

"Well, I'll make this brief, as my time of recreation is over, and I must go back to my Church world again. Mona said:

"I visited the Temple of the Scottish Rite by day and made the plan of the various apartments. Finding that I could secrete myself in the altar, which by reason of its size and ornamental openings gave me a very comfortable resting-place, with peep-holes for observation on all sides, I took the chances of being dis-

covered. Oh, such an oath as I heard repeated! To recall it makes me shudder:

“ ‘I promise to hold sacred naught save this institution, and will if necessary make all things subservient to it, even to forget duty to home, crush out love of family, make sacrifices of country, and deny God himself. I agree that the taking of human life shall be no barrier to manifesting, by act, word, or deed, my devotion to the principles which govern and the ties that shall bind me to it!’ ”

“ ‘Lamb’s blood was then partaken as a token of sincerity. Immediately the candidate was whirled into the air by an automatic catapult and was caught in a receptacle of pulp, which was made of flour and water, so that in purity of person each should be without blemish in his snowy whiteness. Modesty has had many a shock and survived, but, notwithstanding my desire for further light upon the subject, I had to close my eyes and draw the veil, as my nature, hardened by time and experience, revolted at the degenerate visitations upon a defenceless victim.’ ”

“Did they discover her?” eagerly asked Sam in his anxiety.

“No, I think not, as she saw them out, and the lights too, and then escaped with all their secrets.”

“Now, Charles,” said George, “I have listened with very much interest to this disciple of Ananias. It goes to prove that no matter what ‘ism’ might spring out of a disordered brain, somebody could be found to take it up, espouse its cause, organize a following, and give to it a name and an abiding-place. You have been entertaining; listen to me!

“At a banquet board lately, several hundred of Ino Crypti’s converts and admirers had assembled. Crypti,

weak and tottering with illness that had given to him the warning which must come at some time to us all, arose tremblingly to address them. 'My friends, and the literary dwellers in our anti-fraternal world. For years I have been in your hearts, I have indulged in exposing the diabolical schemes of men in the guise of secret organizations, and by the encouragement of your patronage and generous support of the people I have amassed millions of francs as a reward for my philanthropic work. Able assistants have I had among my devotees—in the revered Dr. Ezekiel, and that ever-to-be admired Mona Monon, both of whom to-night send regrets.

" 'I have been the leader of crusades; I have been the welcome guest in library and home circles; I have deterred thousands from forming alliances with fraternities. You have been the students of my books, and my faithful followers. Now, as the sands of my life are running low, and the curtain about to fall upon the drama, I have brought you to partake of a parting touch of hospitality, as to-night I make my valedictory to you and to the world. My heart is not overstrong, and my voice has in it the tremor of strength's decay.

" 'I make this confession. In a spirit of fun I wrote "Hadesiana, or Satan's Pastimes." I thought it would give me fame as a humorist. It was taken in earnest and received as serious surveys of the symposiums of truth. Could it be possible, marvelled I, that it could be so received? The answer is, the enormous wealth that came from those efforts, which aroused this adoration from you, and which has multiplied in manifold editions of my utterances. Dr. Ezekiel had his origin in my brain. Mona Monon never lived, save in my

imagination. Behold in me, my dear, devoted, deluded, and loyal friends, the Ananias of the old dispensation—the Munchausen of the new. There was not the slightest truth in all the tons and tons of printing. You have been deceived; all my people have been deceived; and nearly all the reading world has been deceived, and proved the truth of “what fools these mortals be.”

“The effort was too great for him; he tottered; supported himself upon the table.

“‘My heart! My heart! It’s work is done. It is nearly over—my breath comes short—very short—I recover—slightly—now fill your glasses—and we’ll drink together,’ (holding up his glass), ‘I give you—you—the Grand Master of Liars—of all the world.’

“Draining his glass, he fell—dead.”

CHAPTER XX

"MURDER WILL OUT"

MRS. VIVIAN, somewhat nervous, broke the seal of a type-written addressed envelope, marked "Personal," and read as follows:

"Laboratory,
Vivian Hall Seminary,
Nov. 15, 18—.

Dear Madam:

May I be so bold and unconventional as to ask you to call upon me at the Laboratory this afternoon at 4 o'clock, if convenient, upon a matter of especial interest to yourself.

Very respectfully,

Paul Pennington."

As it was marked "Personal" she kept it so, and conjectured during the day as to the motive of the Principal of the School advising her of a matter of especial interest to her at his laboratory. Could it be that new apparatus were needed and that her favor was first to be courted, in order to get a contribution from Mr. Vivian? Could it be that some electric experiment had so charmed him by its intricacy and success that he wished to honor the wife of his beneficent patron by first imparting the idea to her?

"But, 'of especial interest to yourself' says his letter," queried she, as she read it over again.

Several times she folded it and placed it safely in one of the pigeon-holes of her desk, but quite as often she took it from its resting-place, to be but the more mystified in proportion to the number of perusals.

She wrote:

"Mrs. Vivian will be at the Laboratory at four o'clock."

"To Mr. Pennington," said she, giving it to the butler. "No answer."

A few minutes before four o'clock she started for the Laboratory. She decided to walk over rather than to attract attention by driving up in state to the very unostentatious home of science.

The Seminary boys and girls who had lingered for after-school games, were singly and in groups moving along the street which she was crossing. A wind spurt at that moment disarranged her white feather boa and was flaunting the end of it in an uncontrollable manner.

May Manning, as fate would have it, was speeding along upon her bicycle against the wind, with head down to keep its force from her face, so that she did not see Mrs. Vivian struggling to control the disarranged boa, which, catching on May's bicycle, was snatched from the neck of its owner.

Mrs. Vivian, who barely escaped being thrown by the quickly moving bicycle, which might have seriously injured her, was greatly agitated.

May slowed down, and, dismounting, held out to her the boa. Recognizing Mrs. Vivian did not at all disconcert her. "Mrs. Vivian, I make a most humble apology for my carelessness," she said. "I hope you'll find that the boa is uninjured."

"It was carelessness, May, and I was about to censure you, but I accept your apology," said Mrs. Vivian. "I hope that you did not injure yourself."

"Oh, no!"

"I am glad to hear it," said Mrs. Vivian. "I want

you to forgive me. I was cruel enough to think that you purposely tried to run over me."

"Oh, Mrs. Vivian! How could you be so unkind as to think that of me?"

"I'm very wrong, May, I know," said she, making this admission, which was a great one for her.

Paul Pennington was busily engaged in the laboratory when Mrs. Vivian, finding the door slightly ajar, entered. Paul approached to greet her.

"Mrs. Vivian, I must explain why I did not call to see you instead of my seeming assurance in sending for you——"

"You have a very complete workshop," said Mrs. Vivian, after looking about the apartment. "I suppose you have sent for me to explain you need something new, and want my intervention with Mr. Vivian."

"Oh, no! He is always so generous that we have here one of the most completely equipped of laboratories, and I am striving to make discoveries that may reflect credit on our school and give him pleasure. To-day I have found a new indelible ink, made by a decoction of galls with vanadate of ammonium. This will be better than the other method of dissolving wheat gluten in vinegar and rubbing in India ink or lamp black."

"Why don't you put it on the market?" asked Mrs. Vivian.

"I may do so," responded he, "in connection with my new sympathetic ink."

"What is that," Mrs. Vivian asked, manifesting increased interest.

"It is an invisible ink for secret communications," said he, "and often used for love-letters in writing

between the lines. I had a specimen of such to develop for a lady in our town. The visible script was such that in its beauty it was most perfect and in friendly expression most sincere. Her husband read it approvingly. When I brought out the lines of hidden sentiment it was warm enough to develop itself, madam, as it was one of the sympathetic inks developed by heat."

"This is very interesting," said she.

"Take this piece of white paper—blank apparently," said he. "I have written upon it with my composition of chlorides of cobalt and nickel."

Lighting a jet he held the paper so as to catch the heat upon it. The effect was instantaneous, as writing in green ink appeared upon what otherwise seemed to be a plain surface, devoid of characters of any kind, save the watermark in the paper.

"That is wonderful," said she. "I never have any secrets to write, but I should like to try that."

"With pleasure. You shall have my first manufactured sample," said Paul.

Mrs. Vivian, notwithstanding being entertained, was growing somewhat impatient. Nothing in the interview had yet developed that she could apply directly to herself.

"How does Charles get on in his rectorship?" asked Paul, making a thought-jump completely out of the Laboratory. "I trust he'll find great happiness in his new work."

"I hope so," said she. "But he has about him many members of his congregation whose influence is not for his good. Charles is so easily led, not by flattery,—I think he's above that,—and I deem him to be a

young man of very firm resolves and strong character."

"Then how is he easily led?" asked Paul.

"He has a weakness for several of the female workers who continually make suggestions to him that my experience tells me have always proved failures in church work. He hates to offend anybody, so he says 'yes' oftentimes when his answer should be 'no.'"

"Does perfect harmony prevail in the church?"

"Yes, I think so."

"The reason I ask is that Charles has been disturbed very much of late by the frequency of anonymous communications which have been received by some of the congregation," said Paul, looking into the eye of Mrs. Vivian.

"What is their purport?" she asked.

"Thoroughly scriptural in almost every case," answered Paul, "but very applicable in point of reflection upon some of the recipients."

"It is a shame, isn't it, that anybody could be guilty of anything so cowardly?"

"Yes, that is just what I think. While in these expressions there is nothing criminal, nothing obscene to bring the offender to the law, yet there is a sting about them that touches the sensitive spot and leaves a hurt."

"Does Charles suspect any one?"

"Not in the least. He is surprised to find that anybody in the congregation could be guilty of such conduct."

"How does he know that it comes from the congregation? It may be an outsider."

"True, it may be," said Paul slowly.

"I'd like to see them," said Mrs. Vivian, with marked interest.

"Here they are," replied Paul, spreading out the collection of postal cards upon the table in front of her. "I received one of them myself."

"Quite an array, isn't it? How did you get them?"

"From Charles. There were very few among those prominent in the work of the Church who were spared. Did you get one?"

"No."

"That's singular, isn't it, that you, the head of every movement, should be overlooked?"

"Now, I come to think of it, I did," said Mrs. Vivian. "It seems to me that I did. I know I've seen the writing. If I did get one it must have gone into the waste-basket immediately."

"I have been studying the matter very closely, and that is why I desire to see you."

"What have I to do with it?" she demanded, somewhat indignantly. "I wish you would explain, sir."

"I know the author of the work," said he.

"Indeed! Charles will be grateful could you find out who did it."

"No, I think he will not, and I do not propose to enlighten him; but that depends——"

"Not if you know?"

"I do know," said he confidently. "I stated that my business would be of especial interest to you. I want to share my confidence, so I sent for you."

"Why?"

"Because I thought you might be interested in the matter sufficiently to wish to know who is, under cover, committing an act which disturbs the son of your husband, and the rector of your Church."

"Well?"

"I desire to inform you who is the guilty party before I impart it to Charles, or to any one else."

"Then, sir, I am prepared for this wonderful favor of making me the confidant. Who did it?"

The words leapt quickly out of his mouth, not vindictively, but firmly:

"You did!"

"Do you mean to insult me, sir?" she demanded.

"No, madam, God forbid that I should insult you, or any woman."

"You wrong me then!"

"No, you do the wrong by placing yourself in such a position by such an act, and you cause me the unhappiest moment of my life, to have to stand here and accuse the wife of my benefactor of being guilty of an act that is almost criminal. It nearly breaks my heart to realize that by the reason of my profession I am the accuser."

"Your proof, sir—I demand it," said she, with the fire of indignation flashing from her eyes.

"Here they are—your own writing, which permitted me to trace the guilty hand that did the work. When I reached my conclusion I wrote to you to come to me. Your answer with the same bold strokes and the ink identical with this upon the cards, became the living witness against you. It became a demonstration—a fact—therefore I accuse you! Do you want more proof?"

She lost her fire. Paul continued: "My wish is to save you."

"What are your conditions?" she asked.

"Never let it occur again. My lips are sealed."

CHAPTER XXI

A NEW MOTIVE IN LIFE

"GIVE me those drawings, Dick, you must not destroy them," said Ona, having a pleasant but determined struggle over several black and white efforts which Dick, in a teasing manner, tried to get from her.

"They're no good," said Dick, "and I want to get them out of the way. I thought of giving them to Nathan. They are dead sure to inspire him with a requiem."

"You shall not do so," insisted Ona. "You wish to bury your only talent. A sin, Dick, a sin!"

"You get that from the dominie, don't you? Sin! Cut that out, Ona, please."

"A sin all the same, dominie or no dominie. Why don't you try to give mother pleasure and let us both have pride in you? You must earn something by your pencil and brush, if you have to peddle every piece from door to door."

"And I have to assist you," said Charles, who entered with George at this moment.

"Pardon us for breaking into your tête-à-tête," said George. "We've come upon that very subject. I thought that if I wrote a story, maybe you, Dick, would try your hand at illustrating it."

"Ha! Ha! A good joke!" said Dick. "If you do, I promise to illustrate it, and then eat the drawings."

"There," said Ona, "you're a dear, good brother,— I kiss you."

"After such encouragement I'll begin my task at once," said Dick.

"Charles, when you have so wearied Ona that she dismisses you, join me at Davy's," said George. "I am going to interview Nathan, and take another lesson on the organ."

"Nathan is a study," Charles replied, "so go on to school, we'll excuse you with pleasure."

He found Nathan in Davy's yard.

"Nathan, my visit is exclusively to you," said he, entering.

"Wait, my heart has gone into this symphony. Listen to it! Banished from the home of love, the youth of humble station is lamenting, that though heart had found a resting-place his name could not be received with it. Now to the wars—to the wars! Can't you almost read the crushing disappointment in his face by the sounds? Don't you hear it?"

"Have you written the music?"

"Yes, so as to preserve it for future use. I'll need it."

"Nathan, I have in mind the words of the lullaby our nurse sung when we were baby boys. I forget the music, possibly you might make new music—a new lullaby, Nathan. Give it a rocking swing. Listen—as I recall it:

" 'Stars are sparkling in the skies
While you close your little eyes.
Lullaby! Lullaby!
Angels guard thee in thy sleep;
Faithful vigils they will keep.
Lullaby! Lullaby!

THE VIVIANS

“ ‘Now I lay me,’ sweetly said,
Cuddle children in your bed.
Lullaby! Lullaby!
Into dreamland soon you’ll go,
While I sing you soft and low.
Lullaby! Lullaby!

“ ‘There, bright pleasure-fields for boys;
Harmless sports and gladsome joys.
Lullaby! Lullaby!
Girls shall sweetest harvests reap.
Now—they’re off to sleep—sweet sleep.
Lullaby! Lullaby!’

“Every night those words closed my eyes until I was old enough to close them myself without the assistance of a lullaby, suggesting pleasure-fields and gladsome joys in dreamland,” George continued. “I missed a mother’s voice, Nathan, the tender caress, the good-night kiss. I missed the mother’s knee at which to say the prayer. Can you remember, Nathan, your mother, something and some one that you loved when a boy? The games you played,—and——”

Nathan did not give the least sign of comprehension.

“And the music—the music. It was ever about me—at early morn, with the coming of the day; at noon when the sun was high; and at night when the moon was bright and the stars hung like lanterns in the sky. The impressions made by sound then, yet remain, and I love to recall them.”

George lapsed into silence. He was aroused from his musings by the sound of the hoofs of Davy’s horse upon the road. He saw Davy leaning over, intent upon a figure on the other side of the horse, which proved to be May Manning, who, on a bicycle, was escorting Davy home. Seeing George, Davy slack-

ened the pace of his animal and went towards the enclosure, May following.

Immediately, hat in hand, George approached the fence to greet them with:

"This is a surprise and a pleasure!"

"Now," said May gaily, "which is the surprise and which the pleasure?"

"Both," said George. "I'll not separate you. Davy, greetings to you, as well as to you, happy May!"

"We cannot always judge happiness by a smile," said May. "An orchid grows on a branch that's dead, you know."

"Not in your case, May," said he, "for never were tints nourished by more life than in your sweet self."

"You should consult an oculist, George. You are color-blind," said she. "I think you might be polite and address your remarks to Davy."

"Oh, never mind me, May," said Davy. "I am flattered, even if I am observed, when I am with you. I am glad, however, to see George here. He is not such a frequent visitor as I should be pleased to have him. He knows he's welcome and has a right to be."

"I appreciate your hospitality and kind words, Davy, and in future I'll try to show my appreciation by coming out often. If you'd promise that I should find May here——"

"Hold on, George!" said she. "Let me check you before you get off the track. Davy, he was about to say—if he'd find May here he'd pass by on the other side."

"No," said Davy, "I think he knows what to say pretty well. There's no flower on the place that's brighter to me than May, none that gives more cheer to an old man's declining days than May. I promise

with all my heart that you shall see her here often, if you only come."

"I must not be unjust to you; I came this time to see Nathan."

"Well," said Davy, "that is missionary work. How do you get on? Do you see any light ahead?"

"No, it is yet very dark. Sometimes I think I see the dawn of reason. His consecutive thought and exquisite expression of it would lead me to hope, but it fades as soon as he turns to the musical themes and the great organ, and then I am discouraged. I gave him a lullaby just now, and I see him bending over it intently. I tried the childhood 'racket' on him, as specialists term it, in the hope of beginning at the lower note in his life and running the entire gamut. I'll wait awhile here and will join you at the house presently."

Davy and May continued on, and she resumed the conversation which was begun when she first met Davy, on the way.

"I am older now, Davy, than I was, and as the sun sets every day it sheds its rays on a heavier burden for me. I am patient, you tell me to be so. My mother is silent upon the subject, while you are always so sympathetic, as if you knew and could not tell."

"I know very little, my dear May, save my love for you and yours for me," said Davy feelingly.

"I am so sorry to hear you say so. When mother is here in summer you are the only one with whom she has any communication. You must know something, Davy, and you must tell me. Have you no appreciation of my situation here among the people I love? I am no longer the child. I am mature enough to know that so long as my father is a mystery, I am

also a child of mystery. Why are mother's lips sealed, Davy? Forgive me—as I ask Heaven to do—tell me, does she in fact wear 'a Scarlet letter'?"

"No! No, child! God forbid!" said Davy, realizing that it was necessary to check that trend of thought in the girl's mind. "No, no, erase 'the Scarlet letter'!"

"Thank you for that—but, Davy—you surely know more. There is something you can tell me, you know there is. Now, won't you tell me?"

Davy Burton was never known to be unfaithful to a trust. If the information May desired had been imparted to him in confidence, there is great doubt that he could ever be moved to betray it under any other than the most pressing circumstances, if at all. There was a battle within waging between duty to the mother and his love for May.

"May, I am interested in your happiness. I have watched you developing from a tiny baby girl and have given you many a thought of which you were not aware. Your mother came here to live and has confided in me always because I was the first one to extend the hand of sympathy. You have arrived at an age when the knowledge of your parentage must not be kept from you—because—because—you are wronging your own mother."

"Oh, Davy! Forgive me, please!" said May. "I did not wish you to infer such a thing as that."

"Of course, my child, you could not do so," continued Davy. "I confess my better judgment prevails, and I will tell you all I can, to assure you of the purity and devotion of a good woman—your mother. Margery Coke, of good parentage in the dramatic class, was by unfortunate circumstances thrown

upon her own resources and joined a volunteer company of teachers that went from England to enter upon work in the new Normal School at Sydney, Australia. She, being especially fitted by birth and training, occupied the chair of elocution, and was most successfully engaged, when she met the senior member of the house of Morton and Company, to whom she was married. That was your father, May.

"Your father went to London, and while there he wrote to his wife and told her to go to him. He directed that she should sail by one of the company's ships, which would make the trip by way of South America. On the way, the ship, far out of its course, was wrecked.

"Your mother, being rescued, was landed on an island which was not in the line of commerce. There you were born, so for many months the land in which you saw the light was your St. Helena, and when your mother could leave, it was to be detained for a time at a southern port.

"Communication with Sydney and London brought no response, so it was more than a year before your mother, long since given up for dead, and her babe, reached Sydney, to receive a shock that brought terror to the mother's heart. The house of Morton and Company had changed proprietors, and the senior member, being driven almost to desperation by loss of his wife in such a sad manner, did not have the heart to remain there, so went presumably to England. All trace of him was, however, lost, notwithstanding that she made every effort.

"Being forced again to depend upon her own exertions for support, as before marriage, your mother joined a dramatic company, and became the great

favorite that is known throughout the theatrical world. You were placed with your aunt, and there you have been ever since, and I know you'll never forget the devotion of that dear, good Cynthia who has watched almost every moment of your life since you were given into her care and keeping, by a fond mother, but whose profession is not conducive to rearing children."

"Why didn't mother tell me all this?" asked May, looking up through tearful eyes. "There is nothing of shame in it."

"I think your mother felt that she was wilfully deserted."

"Oh! don't let us think so, Davy. We may wrong a good father. He sent for her; she went; the ship was lost with all on board as he thought; of the rescued he might not have received any tidings; grieving and alone he might have decided to begin life anew, to assist him in forgetting the calamity which had befallen his loved one; he never knew of me. That is my theory—that will always be—and trusting to his being alive, I shall hope to devote my life to finding him."

"That's a darling, charitable girl, as I know you are. I have in my possession some letters which your mother might permit you to see, when she comes again. They might throw some light upon the subject. I'll reason with her and tell her, now that you have reached the age of understanding, she must make more of a confidant of you."

"Then, Davy," said May, "I'll begin my life's work—the search for my father."

CHAPTER XXII

A "CHURCH EUCHRE"

"THE orders are so peremptory from my young customers," mused Sam, the cobbler, "that shoes must be finished to-day, so as to be worn to the card party to-night, that I am crowded with work, proving as a fact that if that strange charity affair is of no other benefit, it is helping me, therefore I should praise it, but in all my years, in this quiet, moral town, I have never heard so much criticism and differences of opinion expressed in the forum of the cobbler as upon this very topic. Of course, it must be my policy to be neutral, so that I may not offend, yet it strikes me it is a very queer and far-fetched style of entertainment for a church society. I used to be pretty fond of cards myself. If I get my hand in there, I feel it in my bones that my old-time fervor will come back, so I say to the old boy, 'Lead me not into temptation!'"

Just as if the thought had suggested his coming, Dick entered with his usual personality of good cheer.

"Ah, Dick! I was speaking of you."

"Something in my favor?"

"Yes, in reference to the card party. I said 'Old boy, lead me not into temptation.'"

"You certainly struck it right; I am here for that purpose. I have brought you a ticket for the party. You shared with me the incident of my unwelcome visit to the Sisters Meeting when Mrs. White pro-

posed this affair, and I am to make you my guest at the culmination. You will not decline, will you?"

"Dick," said Sam, "I once played a very good game. I had to give it up. The hold upon me was too strong."

"That was long ago, Sam," responded Dick. "This is as innocent as a Sunday School. It is really like playing Old Maid, or the children's game of Authors."

"Euchre, isn't it—right and left bower, same as of old?" asked Sam.

"Yes, but angels could play the game and talk of it through Heaven without a word of censure."

"What exaggerated figures you deal in, Dick."

"Besides, Sam, it will be the event of your life, think of several hundred people playing cards. You've often seen many praying—but never in all your sojourn on this ball have you ever mingled in such a scene as this will be. 'Old men and maidens, young men and children.' Cutting, dealing, and I was about to say cheating, for the cause of Charity. Dame Watson said to me as I passed, that it 'hes bin forty years since she teched a kyard,' but she is going simply to have the satisfaction of 'beatin'' Betsey Banter's. 'Gene Atkinson, your neighbor, said also, 'Me and Jame be goin', and when we git to playin', all the rest will lay down their kerds.' So, Sam, you must go, and who knows but you may bring home one of the prizes."

"Prizes, eh?" said Sam. "Stakes?"

"Well, not exactly. It must not be looked upon in that light, but merely as rewards of merit for making the greatest number of points, that is all."

"Well, Dick, thank you for your consideration,"

said Sam, "I'll accept and put on my Sunday togs and look in."

"I know you won't regret it," said Dick, "as I think the experience will be very novel; besides I am told that Prof. Riley, the expert manager from New York, is an entertainment in himself. I don't know where Mrs. White got him, but he is said to unite the social, with the field and Casino, and is very outspoken in his management of these affairs."

"That settles it, I'll go," said Sam.

"All right! Now that my guest is secured, I'll go to assist Mrs. White in entertaining her guest from New York," said Dick, leaving Sam pegging away.

George won the aunt's consent for May to attend, so in the evening they were soon in the throng moving into the town hall.

It was a strange sight for the people who were being introduced to a public euchre party. The stage was decorated with palms, and upon various stands were the prizes to be distributed to the successful players. Some of these prizes were the free-will offerings of the merchants of the town, some the result of what may be properly termed social blackmail, where irresistible smiles of some of the fair ones could not be resisted. Lamps, chairs, stands, cushions with college emblems and flags, silk shirt waists, neckties, perfumery, cigars, a baby carriage, a bird cage, and innumerable household commodities, made up the inventory of inducements for the ambitious.

The box office, which always gladdens a manager's heart, gave delight to the management, as the sale of tickets already guaranteed a marvellous financial success. The people began to arrive in such numbers that many substitute tables had to be pressed into service.

Mrs. St. Clair's party was well placed—Ona and May, with George and Dick as partners, being at the head table. As the affair was novel to the majority of the patrons, there was some confusion in getting a proper assignment to places, but by alert assistants this was accomplished. Mrs. White was in every respect the lady in charge, but she was not courageous enough to present Prof. Riley, so Dick, the obliging, was pressed into service. As they appeared upon the stage it was agreed that a round of applause should greet them. In a very graceful manner Prof. Thornton Riley of New York was presented to manage the affair, and in response he said, "Ladies and Gentlemen. 'He that lendeth to the Lord giveth to the poor,' says the good Book, and your presence to-night indicates that your love of charity is only exceeded by your love of the game. It is a beautiful sight to see so many well-bred contestants in the paddock ready to go to the post, and it is to be hoped that everybody will play with honesty. I should resent it to my dying day should it ever be known that I presided at a social function where any foul play was present. I say success to the successful!"

The first game was played and young girls with car conductors' punches moved up and down the aisles punching cards which indicated that one point had been gained by the successful players.

On all sides could be heard the usual language of the game:

"Well, did you ever see such a hand? Not a trump in it. There, look at that! Was there ever such luck? He turns a bower every time, while I deal myself a nine spot!"

Every player in his time has uttered or heard these

expressions, and Dick and Ona had to change places and partners, so at the end table in a row Ona found herself opposite her milkman—a handsome young fellow, notwithstanding, and a good player, as he did more for her than Dick did, won the first point to be recorded on her card. Luck stayed with George and May, and consequently they became the players at the head table.

"May, you're a fine player," observed George.

"Not better than my partner. We play well together, don't you think so?"

"Yes, May—our hearts seem to be in it. We play in earnest," said George. "I believe I get inspiration from you, May."

"Oh, thank you!" responded May. "I believe you'd sacrifice the truth to make me happy."

George turned up a heart.

"You play hearts to-night," said May. "Is that your favorite?"

"It must be indicative of the prevailing sentiment within, as I feel in love with the whole world," said George.

"I am glad of that," said May, "as that will certainly include me."

"And me," said Eleanor.

"And me," said Sam, the cobbler, who by his extraordinary playing had worked his way to the head table, where chance placed him as the partner of Mrs. St. Clair.

The game ended at last and the entertainment had been a success. In the distribution May Manning was awarded the first lady's prize, which was an order for a tailor-made suit. Sam captured the first prize for men, this being a gold-headed cane. Had it been a

token from the community, he could not have received a greater ovation as he advanced to take it. George won the baby-carriage, and Dick a box of cigars, while Ona carried home a silk shirt-waist. Mrs. White was the object of congratulations, as the euchre party had established the greatest record for substantial results that the ancient town had ever known.

CHAPTER XXIII

PRESENTIMENTS AND THEIR SEQUEL.

As DAVY on horseback and Mr. Vivian afoot were passing along the road together they paused to look at the beauty of the Leland property. The well-kept lawn, the pretty flowers, and abundance of fruit trees surrounding the spacious mansion, attracted their attention.

"Leland left a good estate, sir," said Davy.

"Yes, a large estate," said Mr. Vivian.

"To you, sir, he was largely indebted for it. I wonder if Mrs. Leland knows that?"

"It is quite immaterial, Davy. Gratitude did not run very strong in old Leland, and he was quite forgetful—quite forgetful. I did think that in his will he might have made provision to cover a matter of some importance to me—a financial settlement of some kind. However, I'll not wrong him. I wish his widow and children every enjoyment of the estate."

"It should be yours, sir, I know it," said Davy, "and I have papers which if brought to light might show a reversion, sir, that a will could not defeat."

"Where are they? I hoped you had destroyed them."

"At the Clerk's Office, in my private files. I could not destroy the record-books, so I kept the papers."

"You never mentioned them," said Mr. Vivian.

"Why, you know well, Mr. Vivian, that at the time of his death and often since then I have mentioned the

subject. You have silenced me, and as you requested me to destroy them I said nothing more about them, not wishing you to wrong yourself."

"Well, Davy, let it pass. Let us forget that we spoke of it again," said Mr. Vivian, walking on leisurely beside Davy.

"I see George at the place quite frequently, Davy," said Mr. Vivian. "He is not curious about our confidential relations, is he?"

"No! No! Not any more than usual. He is aware of the fact that you take an interest in me, that's all. He has manifested very much interest himself in Nathan, and is endeavoring to bring back his reasoning."

"Poor George! Little knows he of his task," said Mr. Vivian. "I doubt if he'd enjoy the compensation for his trouble. What progress does he make?"

"Very little, though Nathan is most rational at times. He has been on a queer subject lately, insisting upon my making a will. He said, 'If you die, Davy, what is to become of me?'"

"Did he say that? Does he ever mention me?"

"Yes, he calls you 'Old Vivian, the Autocrat,' and says, 'He carries a secret, too, Davy.'"

"True, if he only knew. We all do, Davy—we all do," said Mr. Vivian, feelingly. "Now, I'll leave you. It will all come right some day, Davy, and if there have been any wrongs they will be righted. When I part from you, my good friend, I always feel as if I must renew the assurance of my confidence in you."

"Thank you, sir, again and again. I have tried to prove faithful to every trust."

"Davy, I really hate to part with you. I somehow have a sort of presentiment——"

"Oh, sir! Presentiments mean nothing—put them aside," said Davy, endeavoring to have him shake off such a feeling.

"It is foolish, isn't it? But I cannot help feeling that our 'good-bye' may sometime be 'farewell.' Give me your hand, Davy. God bless and keep you! If aught occurs to me you know that in my life I intentionally wronged no living being. Good-bye, Davy, and farewell!"

"Well," said Davy, as he sat in the saddle looking after the disappearing form of his good friend, "he is way down! I have never seen him so much so before. What can it mean?"

"Davy, are you asleep, and dreaming? Wake up," said May, with cheery voice.

"Oh, my dear May! Pardon me, I was lost for the time being, and I am so glad that you have brought me back again to myself. My thoughts have been so terrible, so alarming to me, that I'm all in a tremble."

"What is it, what can it be, Davy?"

"Nothing, child, that could alarm you. It is about Mr. Vivian. He talked so strangely about presentiments and said farewell, as if he—oh, well—don't you ever believe in presentiments, May. They cause so much worry, sometimes without the least foundation."

"I am not superstitious, Davy, but don't you believe in signs and dreams?"

"No, I can't say that I do. If so, I ought to be gloomy and not very bright now. I had a dream last night about a fight with a cloud. I had on armor, and held in my hands a long weapon like a spear. I went at this cloud as if it were an advancing foe. It completely surrounded me——"

"And," said May eagerly, "it conquered you?"

"Yes. But dreams go by contraries, so I am safe. You see I have been reading 'Don Quixote.'"

"That explains it. You thought you were fighting windmills. I see."

"Then, May, my picture fell this morning."

"Oh, that's awful!"

"Oh, no, nothing in that either, so get such notions out of that young head. The wire was old and worn, just as I am, May, and could not sustain the weight longer, so it gave way and fell—surely a very satisfactory explanation—nothing supernatural in that."

May had moved along slowly and both had become so engrossed in their serious conversation that they did not observe a commotion down the street caused by the hasty movement of people to one objective spot. Their interview was suddenly terminated by the sound of bells and the cry of "Fire!"

The clouds of smoke indicated a conflagration of some proportions, and when the suggestion reached them that it was the Court House, Davy abruptly broke away from May and went galloping down the street in the wake of the speeding mass of people, shouting:

"Look out ahead! Make way there!"

When Davy reached the scene, smoke was issuing from the court-room side of the building. Dismounting, he rushed within the lines to the Clerk's Office, which, though supposed to be fire-proof, might go the way of many other "fire-proof" structures when put to the test. Here was the accumulation of the documentary evidence of his faithfulness to the duties of his office. To save these was his first purpose, so, enlisting many assistants, in a very short time the con-

tents of shelves, covered with the dust of years, were safely resting under the shade of one of the big elms in the Court House yard. Resting upon a rustic seat to recover his breath, he was joined by May, who sought him as soon as she arrived. She, too, was nearly out of breath.

"Davy, are you hurt?"

"No, May, trying to get my wind, that is all. I reached here just in time to get out all the court papers for many years back, and it is well that I was here to think of it, as the clerk and his force have been bringing out only the land records and dockets."

"Is there much of a fire?"

"Can't tell. It's all on one side. I hope there will not be much loss."

"I hope not, too," responded May.

"My God, May!" said Davy in a manner that startled her, he having been struck by a sudden thought. "I must go in again. My private papers in the safe I entirely forgot."

"Let me go, Davy," said she, trying to prevent his return. "I'll go; I'll get them for you."

"Bless you, child. You wouldn't know them. I'll go. There's no fire there. I am not afraid of smoke."

Her efforts to restrain him were without avail, and in he went, regardless of the prevailing clouds of smoke that seemed to envelop the interior of the building. The fire was controlled and confined to one side. As Davy lingered, May's anxiety increased, and being of a daring nature she would have gone herself to his rescue had she not been forbidden by the firemen.

"Davy, Davy!" she called in her eagerness, as she ran. "Will not somebody go?"

"Yes, I will, May," said George Vivian, who had just arrived.

"Oh, George, thank God you've come! Davy has gone in for his papers. He'll be suffocated I know, unless he's rescued."

George was off in a moment. His bravery inspired courage among the young men standing around, and muffling their mouths so as to prevent inhaling the fumes of the smoke, they daringly went to the relief of Davy. Soon they returned, bearing him unconscious, and laid him upon the ground at the feet of May. She was blinded with tears, but had presence of mind sufficient to place her ear upon his heart and to rejoice in finding it active, thus giving assurance of the presence of life.

Davy succeeded in recovering his papers, but, in returning, he had succumbed to the smoke just within the main doors, so George did not have to proceed very far before he fell over his prostrate form.

In his hand now the old man clutched two sealed packages, one marked "Charles Vivian," and the other "Margery Manning."

CHAPTER XXIV

A COMPLETED MISSION

A CLOUD like a pall hung above the Hardgone home, so that the rising sun next morning did not come peeping into Davy's room as it was wont to do, bringing the cheerfulness of its rays, nor had the light of reason shed its brightness yet upon Davy's mind.

The watchers had been faithful, hopefully awaiting the slightest indication of the return of consciousness. Doctor and nurses were alike on the alert. To May, by every right, seemed to belong the privilege of head nurse, she being nearer to him than any other person, and having arranged for and superintended the removal of Davy to his home the evening before, she was the first to assume charge and had not for a moment relinquished her position.

George and Dick were able assistants, and vied with each other in relieving her as much as possible of the burden. May was so accustomed to visiting the sick in humble homes, as well as at the hospital, that she possessed more than ordinary ability.

Ona very kindly came to May's assistance, and proved her practical usefulness. What nurses they were—May and Ona! The Vestal Virgins were not more faithful in keeping the sacred fires lighted than they were in waiting—only waiting—until the curtains were drawn aside and just one ray of perception found its way into the now darkened mentality of old

Davy. Often May's little hand rested on his beating heart as if to inspire hope.

"Oh! Ona," said she, "if he would only speak again!"

"Let us hope," said Ona, "that he will not die. The doctor says he may arouse from this stupor, though his opinion is that he suffered a slight stroke, to which his condition is due, more than to suffocation. They fear heart-failure."

Everything was still for several minutes, then Ona called out:

"Oh, May!"

Davy's eyes were opening and their gaze seemed to be searching for the face of some loved one. Then, seeing May, he tried to speak, but it was with great difficulty.

"Oh, Davy," quickly called May, as she could not restrain her anxiety, "do you know me?"

"Yes—May—it is May," said Davy.

"And Ona, too," said May.

"I am glad—bless you, dear children."

May had gone to call George, Dick, and the Doctor, who were waiting below.

"Come quick—Davy knows me! He is with us again!" said she. "Come quick, Doctor!"

Quietly they came to the bedside. Davy, recognizing all of them.

The Doctor at once proceeded to administer stimulants. He then dismissed the boys and left May and Ona to watch quietly for any evidence of a return of strength. As the day was waning, Davy seemed to brighten some, and to awaken to a sense of realization as to his condition and the cause.

May was sitting alone, his hand in hers, Ona having gone home to rest.

"May, did you get the package for your mother?" asked Davy, slowly.

"Yes, and one for Mr. Vivian. You would have sacrificed your life for them."

"They are of great importance, May."

"That may be, but they are nothing compared to your life, Davy."

"The sands of my life have but few grains left, at best. Very little could be lost—very little."

"The parting would grieve me so," said May.

"Providence ordains a balm for grief," said he, consolingly. "I am glad we saved the papers. Give them to your mother. She confided them to my keeping years ago. Among them may be the key to unlock the secret—who knows—your mother?"

"If so she has kept it from her daughter," said May thoughtfully.

"To do her justice, I believe she is almost as much in the dark as you are, and that, with her, all hope of ever meeting your father again has vanished. So she said to me at our last interview."

"I propose not to abandon hope until I find that he is either living or dead."

"That I am sincere, my dear little girl, in wishing you success, you know now; but you will be more so when I am gone, as I have provided for your support in the undertaking. If I can pull through this terrible shock to my old system, we can return the package to its old resting-place in the safe. If God's will is otherwise, place them in Margery's hands."

"I'll do just as you say, Davy," replied May.

A shuffling footstep aroused them, and, turning to

the door, May observed Nathan peering in as if to inquire about the sick. He knew that something was wrong and had waited in his den all day for Davy's coming to give his usual greeting while on the way to the barn to get the horse.

Hardgone was around as usual about his duties. Nathan seldom intruded himself upon the home people, and so had generally very little conversation with any of the family.

"Where's Davy to-day?" asked Nathan of Hardgone, in a perfectly rational manner.

"He was hurt at the fire yesterday, and the Doctor does not know whether he'll live through it. He has not come to yet. It's just like a fit. You know what that is, don't you?"

"Sometimes I do, and sometimes I don't," responded Nathan. "Is he going to die?"

"I have my fears. The Doctor says nothing—only shakes his head."

"I see! I see!" said Nathan as Hardgone left him, meditating. Then looking in the direction of the house he went toward it, and sought Davy's room.

"It is Nathan," said May to Davy.

"Let him come in."

"Come in, Nathan," she said.

He entered eagerly and was soon on his knees beside the couch, where he clasped the hand of Davy which was resting on the outside of the coverlid.

"Oh, my kind friend! Don't leave me! If you go what will become of me? Have pity, Davy, have pity!"

"Nathan, I'm not going yet. Calm yourself."

"Oh, yes, you are," replied Nathan. "I know it!"

I feel it! I hear it! The angels are making marches to escort you to the throne."

"Hush, Nathan," said May, "you must not talk so. Does it worry you, Davy?"

"Oh, no! I am accustomed to Nathan. He's had me with wings, flying through the pearly gates, many hundred times."

"There!" cried Nathan. "Can't-you hear them, Davy? You, so near Heaven, can't you hear them? This room is filled with them. I must go; I must catch them before they die out! Good-bye, Davy! Good-bye, Davy! I go to make your funeral march to the land of light, to the home of understanding, to the abode of reason! March! March! March!" said he, moving along the hall on his way down.

"Oh, Davy, I am so glad he's gone! At other times we humor him in his vagaries, but not now. How weird he is?"

"I often ask myself," said Davy, "if the light will ever come to him."

"And I, too," said Mr. Vivian, overhearing the remark as he softly entered. "Ah, May! How is your patient. Or can he speak for himself?"

"Mr. Vivian, I am glad to say he can speak for himself, though very slowly."

"I understand that the rescuing of those papers nearly caused you to lose your life," said Mr. Vivian. "Had you destroyed them years ago you might have been spared this warning of mortality."

"Mr. Vivian—it would not have been just to you, to destroy them years ago, nor to have them destroyed yesterday, as I thought they would be. I saved those for you, and a package for May's mother. The sacrifice is not great, even if I do not recover. So, Mr.

Vivian, I return to you the confidence of years, untrayed and unbroken."

May whispered to Mr. Vivian that if he'd remain to watch awhile she would go to summon the Doctor, for while the mental activity of Davy was normal, yet she feared the heart.

"What did Nathan say, Davy?" asked Mr. Vivian, when May was gone.

"The only rational thing was, 'What is to become of me?'"

"I wonder," said Mr. Vivian, "whether he realizes sufficiently to have any fear on that score. He's amply provided for, under any circumstances."

"Yes, Mr. Vivian, thanks to you, sir, that is assured for all time."

Davy dropped off in a doze, and Mr. Vivian continued to sit beside him.

When the Doctor entered with May, Mr. Vivian aroused with a start.

"Ah, Doctor! Is it you? I must have been dreaming. I'm a very poor watcher to be left with the sick."

"Has he been some time in this state?"

"Yes. We were talking, and I thought he was tired and had fallen asleep."

"His heart is weaker," said the Doctor, shaking his head.

"Oh, Doctor," said May, "don't turn our hope to doubt!"

Mr. Vivian looked for a time upon the face of his old friend and clasped one of his almost lifeless hands, then turned to leave. May accompanied him from the room.

"A great lesson, May," said he, "for us all."

As he was going out he encountered both of his

boys, and Ona and Dick, with whom he informed them of Davy's condition.

"Well, May," said Ona, "are you not completely worn out?"

"No, not worn out, grieved out," responded May. "Davy cannot recover, Doctor Simpson says."

"May," said George, "you are overdoing your mission, are you not? You'll be down with nervous prostration."

"Don't fear for me, George. I am very careful, besides I am in my element when I am thus engaged."

"I know that, but it is very serious work for one so young."

"A labor of love may have its serious side, but is not the burden greatly lightened?"

George would have continued, but was interrupted by Ona, who had come to tell him that Davy had awakened and that he would be pleased to see "Mr. Charles."

Charles and Dick had gone out to see Nathan in his den. Nathan did not pause even to welcome them, but muttered as he wrote, "A requiem—for Davy."

George summoned Charles, who re-entered the house and was conducted to the presence of Davy. As his face was not toward the door he did not see the young rector enter. Doctor Simpson announced him as "the Reverend, Mr. Vivian." Davy's voice was weaker than ever, yet his mind was strong.

"Mr. Charles—I am glad to see you—I am about to give up the job, sir."

"I trust not, Davy."

"Oh, yes, I am resigned to it. You know something about that passage: 'I have fought the good fight.' That's me. I do not murmur, sir."

"Then, Davy, may I ask God's grace upon you—and all of us?"

"Yes, with all my heart I ask it—with all your heart, Mr. Charles, make the invocation."

All knelt. Ona with Charles on one side of the bed, May with George on the other, and Dick at the foot. It was a fervent prayer, to which Davy said "Amen!"

"May," softly spoke Davy, "sing 'Abide with me.'"

She did, and Davy tried to utter the words after her sweet voice, which was filled with tears.

"The darkness deepens, Lord with me abide!"

The sun had gone, and Davy with it!

CHAPTER XXV

HOW A WILL WAS FOUND

AFTER a diligent but unavailing search for a will, Mr. Vivian formally took charge of the estate of Davy, which was of considerable value in personalty, besides the investments of trust funds held by him in fiduciary capacities. The home place was not at all disturbed. Hardgone remained in possession, and Nathan Thorne, who had long been a charge upon it, continued to live as he had lived before.

Nathan kept in his "den" for a number of days after Davy's death, and as his habits were never questioned it attracted no more than usual attention. Dick was a frequent visitor, and, with Hardgone, he devoted himself to searching for any documents that might have been placed in any out-of-the-way places, or hid between the covers of old books, in the hope of finding a will, that every one, who knew of Davy's regular business habits, felt certain had been executed.

Just as Dick was departing from the farm one evening, about a month after the death, Nathan accosted him in an unusually bright manner.

"You've been looking for something," said he. "I know. What did you find, eh? Nothing—nothing?"

"That's so, nothing, Nathan, of any importance," said Dick, surprised at seeing him quite so rational.

"Hard luck for me, then. I do not seem to be provided for. Where's old Vivian? What does he say?"

I've seen him sneaking around here, but not a word to me, peeking in and out of the house and barn and making notes, but not such notes as I make when inspired. Tell me, am I to go?"

"No, Nathan," said Dick, "you're all right. Davy's death will not affect you."

"Dick—I want to tell you a secret," said Nathan. "Come with me!"

He led Dick to the barn, and pointing to Davy's saddle-bags said, "Did you look in there?"

"No, I did not, but others did weeks ago," responded Dick.

"Look now, Dick, look now!" said Nathan with some eagerness.

"What for, Nathan? Why do you want me to look there?"

"You may find something," said he, "something of importance to all of us."

"Then I'll not look," said Dick, "unless there is some one here with me. Come away, Nathan. If I find somebody in the house I'll return."

Nathan seemed very much disappointed, but had to yield to Dick, and, like an obedient dog, he followed him across the lawn to the house.

"Come go with me to the barn," said Dick, addressing Hardgone and his daughter. "Nathan suggests that in the saddle-bags something important may be found. It may be one of his hallucinations, but I prefer to take no chance of bringing forth any paper without a witness, so both of you come with me and we'll humor Nathan, so far as an inspection goes, anyhow." They hastened to the barn. Then Hardgone took down the saddle from its place and felt and looked carefully in one of the bags.

"There's nothing there," said he. "I fear it is one of Nathan's pranks."

From the other, however, he brought forth a piece of yellow paper such as Davy had been accustomed to use to back papers.

"I told you that you'd find something," said Nathan, who had slowly crept upon them as they were contemplating the paper.

"Davy's handwriting," said Hardgone, being the first to examine the script.

"Yes," said Dick, "it looks very much like it. We'll go in to the light and examine it. It looks like a will."

When they went into the house Nathan was with them, and showed more than usual interest in the family proceedings.

Dick then read the paper. It was as follows:

"I give and bequeath all of my estate, real and personal, to John Hardgone, and his heirs, in trust to enjoy the proceeds for the support of himself and family during his lifetime, and to provide forever for Nathan Thorne home and maintenance. To my relative, Cynthia Stokes, I give an annuity of \$500 per annum. I name Richard Leland as executor without bond.

David Burton."

"It is very strange that it could have been overlooked when a search was made in those bags before," said Hardgone. "I thought that every public and private paper was handled separately."

"He did keep his papers there, didn't he?" asked Dick.

"Oh, yes!"

"That is something in its favor," said Dick. "This

being a holograph will, unexecuted, it would be necessary to show that it was found in a place where the testator kept his private papers. This you can do."

"There's no doubt of that," said Hardgone, "but I do doubt the paper itself as being his act. I had no claim on Davy, to be thus considered in his bounty."

"Of that," said Dick, "I have nothing to say, but as we have discovered this paper in a somewhat mysterious manner I'll write out a statement of the finding and we can swear to it, then I'll submit the whole matter to George Vivian for his advice as to proper proceedings in such cases."

This he did, but George doubted the genuineness of the handwriting, and only after submitting it to a number of banking people and the Clerk of the Court and his assistants, who had every reason to know Davy Burton's writing, did he suggest that it should be probated as a will.

Mr. Vivian, Sr., could not understand it, even though he confessed that it bore a very strong resemblance to the writing of his old friend.

Davy was not related to Hardgone and was not under obligations to him, as the relationship between them was more like a landlord and tenant than otherwise; nor was Davy compelled to provide for Nathan Thorne in a will, as he was a beneficiary under a continuing trust. Then, too, why should he select Dick Leland as executor, when never before had they had any business in common? These questions ran through the mind of Mr. Vivian.

Accompanied by Hardgone, Dick started one morning for George's office, to talk the matter over.

"This matter may be something upon which you can congratulate yourself, Hardgone, but it is like a

white elephant on my hands, and I wish for my sake I had been omitted from any part in the affair. I feel like a criminal, though for your sake I'll do everything that is right. If it was Davy's wish that you should be his heir, I'll spare neither time nor money to obtain for you every protection of the law in the enjoyment of your heirship, but if I have the least doubt I'll work against you."

"I am sure, Dick, you know me well enough to know that I want nothing but what is right. If that is Davy Burton's will—and I swear he made it uninfluenced by me, or mine—then it would be very unjust to Davy and myself not to make a proper endeavor to sustain it. My poverty has never made me dishonest."

"I believe you, Hardgone," responded Dick, as they entered the office, where George fortunately was alone and could see them immediately.

"George, I thought you might wish to talk with Hardgone as well as myself, so here we are, and at your service," said Dick.

"Well, the document is so clouded with doubt that I can find nothing in the paper or the circumstance that can make me believe it is Burton's work."

"Not a very bright outlook for Hardgone as beneficiary, nor me as executor," said Dick.

"No," said George. "I confess that is so, therefore we had better converse as friends and not as lawyer and clients."

"Well," said Dick, "it is not necessary to draw the line on sight. We are open to conviction, are we not, Hardgone?"

"That may be true," said George. "Neither of you

may think as I do, and I do not wish to preclude either of you from obtaining counsel elsewhere."

"Very professional, and very courteous, I admit, but let us talk as Davy's friends," said Dick.

"Well, that being understood, I'll be free to ask a few questions. Dick, you sit there; Hardgone, you there," said George, pointing to vacant seats at a long table, on which were writing materials. "Take the pen and write as I dictate. 'I give and bequeath'——"

"Hold up, George," said Dick, about to begin, then suddenly pausing as if struck by an idea. "What do you mean? This is going too far!"

"As friends of Davy, Dick."

"What? In Heaven's name, you would not suspect either of us, would you?"

"Of course not, Dick. Don't be a fool. I want to shield you, if such a suspicion should arise at any time.

"Don't hesitate, gentlemen," continued George. "This, I assure you, is in the right direction, and for your own protection, should the necessity arise. Let us proceed."

Dick quietly finished his exercise.

"There," said he, "compare that if you wish."

Hardgone struggled with his, thus proving that he was not a very facile penman.

"I am willing that you should use my struggle at any time or place," said he. "I get very little consolation out of it myself, as I can scarcely read it when I write it."

"This is conclusive and settles the point in my mind," said George, examining the writings. "Hardgone could not if he would. Dick would not if he

could. Now let the mercury of your indignation go down a little, young man."

"I confess it did go up with me," said Dick, "and I felt it keenly at the moment that you should ask such a thing of either of us. Do we look like conspirators?"

"A lawyer's privilege, Dick."

"Yes, but we ruled out the lawyer at the beginning, and started as friends of Davy."

"My act proved it," said George. "You are the two interested parties. When there is so much doubt, I wished at the outset to quash any suspicion that might find place among those who are neither your friends nor Davy's."

"Well, I'll let you be the judge," said Dick, in a yielding tone. "I am sure I regret more than I can tell that I am in it, whether it is all right or all wrong."

"Let me see the alleged will, Dick," requested George. "You have not filed it yet, have you?"

"No, but I am just about to do so," said he, handing him the paper.

"I do not know Davy's handwriting well enough to pass upon it in comparison with other writings," said George, examining the paper. "Hardgone," he continued, "is this Davy's writing?"

"It impressed me so."

"If it is not his, is there any one within your knowledge whom you could suspect of having written it?"

"But I believe it to be his," persisted Hardgone, innocently dodging the question.

"Then there is nothing left for Dick but to offer it for probate."

"Will you do it for me?" asked Dick.

"No; as I do not believe it to be Davy Burton's will, I could not be a conscientious advocate for its probate."

"That means, Hardgone, that we must seek counsel elsewhere," said Dick.

"Yes," said George, smiling.

"If you are not with us, you are against us; but how strong are you going to be against us?"

"That depends upon circumstances. If I know nothing more than I do now, I'll have nothing to say whatsoever."

"Well, Mr. Vivian," said Hardgone, "this is no making of mine. I had no hand in it, so please keep me still in favor, whatever comes of the matter."

"There is nothing personal in it, Hardgone, so far as I am concerned," said George, earnestly. "You are free to act in accordance with your pleasure."

They had no difficulty in obtaining counsel immediately. Mr. Gottlieb Hogan, learned in his profession, and in it for fame and fees, filed a petition and gave notice by publication, besides personally serving Cynthia Stokes, in whose behalf May consulted George. Her Aunt denied the will and declined the annuity, so George was retained to file a caveat, which was so much more to his gratification, as it accorded with the opinion he had hastily formed and not hesitated to express, so that if the paper writing should stand, it would have to be by the strongest proof possible and the verdict of a jury in its favor.

After many interviews with May and others, while the order of publication was running its time, he hoped still for something further by way of evidence.

"May," said George, upon one occasion when she had called at his office in regard to the case, "you know

Davy's writing, don't you? What do you candidly and honestly think of the will?"

"I do not believe it to be Davy's at all, as I see no reason why the dear old man, who was always the soul of honor, should conceal any honest purpose. That paper is not his will, and I am surprised that Dick should favor it."

"May, don't censure Dick, as he is sorry to figure in it. Tell me, could Davy do any writing during that last day?"

"No. When not in a stupor he talked, but never wrote."

"Did he say anything to you about a will?"

"No, but I believe that had he made a confidant of any one, he would have done so of me."

"So do I," said George. "He provides for your Aunt Cynthia. What is the degree of relationship?"

"She is his half-sister, for they had the same mother, therefore related to me."

"If we set aside this document it may be for your benefit to trace, as directly as possible, the kinship to Davy. Your mother might help you."

"Oh, no!" said May, with a doubtful shake of her head. "I never expect help from that source. She knows that I am here, and that contents her; but as to relatives, that seems to be a closed chapter between us."

"May, why don't you confide in me? You know that I am never happier than when serving you."

"You know I do appreciate your friendship and your interest in me, and I, too, confess to some happiness when—oh, pshaw!—I forgot what I was going to say—you have flurried the thoughts away from me—by looking so intently at me."

"Call them back, May, and I'll look the other way. I'll blindfold my eyes. Try, won't you?"

"I can't now," said May. "Come, Mr. Lawyer, get down to business first, then blindman's buff afterwards. What shall I do for you to help on the work?"

"Tell Mr. Pennington I'd like to see him to-day after school. Then we will find out something conclusive, as I have great faith in his science."

"I trust so," said May heartily. "Now I'll go, as I must not be late, so good-bye till we meet again."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE SHADOWS OF DOUBT

MR. PENNINGTON was soon in the service of George Vivian. Together they went to the Clerk's office in the Court House, which had been the scene of the conflagration a month before, and which had cost Davy Burton his life.

George placed the will in Pennington's hands and left him among the archives, which contained much of Davy's life-work.

The examination and comparison of handwriting is a most fascinating occupation, especially when characteristics mutely and undeniably express a statement of facts upon which to build a complete structure of an opinion. So Pennington's task was an absorbing pleasure, from which he did not emerge until the day was dim, and the custodian was anxiously waiting to close the record room.

George had left his office, so Pennington wrote upon the memorandum pad upon his door these words, "A physical impossibility."

These words were read by George with much satisfaction the following morning, as the declaration fully sustained his own opinion, and determined him in his purpose of waging a brief, but very vigorous effort to prove the worthlessness of the mysterious piece of paper which purported to be the will.

Several weeks later Charles Vivian and Dick Leland were discussing the will.

"What is that, Dick, about some having greatness thrust upon them? Do you feel that way?"

"No, I do not," said Dick earnestly, "and for once in my life I feel that I am an object of interest in a manner I do not at all relish."

"I did expect you to become famous in Art when the magazine next month comes flaming with Doré II's illustrations of 'The Great Dr. Frazius,' by the new writer, etc., etc., but it was left for innocent, harmless, lovable old Davy to set you on Fame's pinnacle like the weather-cock on the Church."

"I feel just like one," said Dick. "You know, Charles, I have no heart in this matter, as I am legally, not at all personally, the proponent."

"I understand it, my boy, perfectly, but, of course, we have such a peculiar community that no doubt many people think you greatly benefited by such an appointment."

"I wish they had the job, but as I am in it I must see it through, and the hearing on Monday cannot come too quickly for me."

"You're to be a witness," said Charles.

"Yes, only to finding the paper, though. I know nothing more. I am the last person in the world Davy would have selected to be his executor. He liked me well enough—saw me grow, knew my father, but had no confidence in me. Why should he? Why should anybody, when it comes to that?"

"What do they say at home?"

"They? You mean, what does Ona say?"

"Well—yes. What does Ona say? She has very clear judgment on all topics."

"She says he did not make it the day he died, as

she was there nearly all the time with May, and that if he had made it before he would have had witnesses."

"That's my opinion," said Charles.

"I'll tell Ona you agree with her, though she'd expect that," answered Dick. "My mother and sister advise me to get out of the affair, but I've given my word to Hardgone to see it through, no matter how it ends. The estate pays the expense, you know, and I have several lawyers who will not scruple sending a bill, though I've arranged for contingent fees."

"I am anxious," said Charles, "to see and hear George in his first big case. I think he is getting very much interested in May, so he'll make it a labor of love in part."

"Well," said Dick, "we have a line of witnesses composed of reputable and well-known citizens who will march up to the stand in procession and say it is Davy's will."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE INVISIBLE MINSTREL

THE court-room was crowded, as the Burton Will Case had already reached the distinction of a *cause celebre*. Never before at any trial in that building had so many women been in attendance, and the reserved space within the bar had seldom, if ever, presented so animated a scene as upon this memorable morning. The dingy room seemed to put on new life and be in a smiling mood.

Eleanor St. Clair and Helen White, with Charles, had prominent seats, being personal friends of leading counsel and party in interest. Ona and May sat together, as they had been summoned as witnesses. Mrs. Stokes, who lived very much the life of a recluse, sat near them, and her features showed that she relished not at all the notoriety incident to being a contestant in a court proceeding. Judge Heath—most exemplary of his kind—sat upon the Bench. His round face beamed with the kindness of his nature, and softened the dignity of his calling.

The jury was acceptable to both sides. The will was offered, and Richard Leland was the first witness called to prove the finding of it. This evidence was corroborated by Hardgone and his daughter. Then, in order, came the Clerk of the Court, who had been associated with Burton officially for more than forty years; the president of the Bank, several cashiers and

tellers, directors of insurance companies, and former business companions of Burton, who were familiar with his handwriting. All of these expressed belief in the genuineness of the signature to the will.

George waived an opening and the Clerk of the Court was recalled to verify the handwriting of Davy Burton upon Court records and documentary exhibits for nearly fifty years prior to his death. Mr. Vivian testified very feelingly.

Amid a stillness that was oppressive, George handed a paper to Mr. Vivian, and asked:

"By reason of your association and confidential relations with the deceased, by your knowledge of his estate, and familiarity with his trust positions, and intimate acquaintance with his handwriting, do you believe that to be the signature and the last will of David Burton?"

There was a pause before the answer, just long enough to give it emphasis.

"No, sir," said Mr. Vivian. "As there's a God in Heaven, that is not the writing, nor the will of David Burton."

There was no cross-examination. Wise it is in the lawyer who keeps a witness, certain in his statement and emphatic in his expression, from indelibly impressing upon the jury a damaging fact, as is so often done by cross-examination.

May and Ona both acquitted themselves with credit. May, besides relating the incidents of the fire, the saving of the Court records, and Davy's last day on earth, even to the sadly sweet parting with life, was permitted to say that in her opinion it was not a genuine will. Many old friends who had enjoyed business relations with Burton came on the stand to express an

opinion against the paper. Then Mr. Pennington was called, and upon qualifying to the satisfaction of the proponents and the Court as an expert in handwriting, he was permitted to testify.

"Mr. Pennington," said George, "I handed to you the official papers of this Court from 1850 up to the time of David Burton's death, about two months ago. These contained superscriptions and endorsements of returns in David Burton's handwriting. Have you examined all of them so as to familiarize yourself with the same?"

"I have."

"I handed to you an alleged will purported to have been written by David Burton about the time of his death. Have you made a comparison of the writing in this document with the writings upon the Court papers?"

"I have."

"Have you been able by such a comparison to reach a conclusion, and to express an opinion as to the genuineness of the alleged will?"

"I have."

"What is that opinion?" asked George.

"That it is *not* the handwriting of David Burton, therefore it is not his will."

"Please explain to the jury how you have reached such a conclusion. You may assist yourself with the chalk or board or with large white sheets of paper and charcoal crayon, both being at your service."

During his testimony the witness had occasion to enlarge the characteristics. As a result of his dexterity with the crayon a *fac-simile* of Davy's chirography presented clearly to the jury and the large assemblage of interested spectators. Having a long table at his

use, he spread out before the jury the writings of many years, taking specimens from the first ten years, when it was like copper plate, in its clear, round, steady, strong, characteristic hand. In several rows he displayed the specimens of the succeeding decades, and then beside them he placed the will.

"Now," said he, "having placed before you in juxtaposition the work of years, I wish you to make your own comparison with my assistance. The beauty of the writer's skilled hand continues, as you will observe, through thirty years, uninterrupted and unshaken. The next decade, up to 1890, presents a slight nervousness, attributable to increasing age. In 1890 and on, the unsteadiness is most marked, so that no line is free from it, and disturbed joinings occur most frequently, until, within a few months and up to his latest writings, we find the hand so unnerved that every line is touched by age and infirmity. Compare now the bold, steady, smooth strokes of the will in some studied hand, devoid of David Burton's personality, and you will find a comparison between it and David's genuine work of thirty years ago, which is an utter impossibility, in fact, a physical impossibility. Burton could not restore his nerves to their youthful condition, could not renew at his age his handwriting, could not under any circumstances have written the will, except, gentlemen, by working a miracle, and we do not live in the age of miracles."

"Mr. Pennington," asked Mr. Hogan, in the cross-examination, "you seem remarkably certain of your opinion. It is only an opinion, isn't it?"

"That is all, sir."

"Based upon a comparison of writings?"

"Yes, sir—and something more in this case."

"What more, sir?" quickly asked Mr. Hogan.

"A demonstration that admits of no doubt whatsoever."

"You are not infallible, are you?"

"Oh, no, sir," quietly responded Pennington. "In making such a comparison I do not pretend to be the witness. This remarkable presentation of chronological evidence testifies for itself. I am the means of pointing it out to the jury. It is infallible. It proves itself; it admits of no doubt."

"That is your opinion," said the examiner, with a tone that was intended to signify that it had made but a slight impression upon him. So Mr. Pennington was waved off with a dramatic gesture.

The second day brought the rebuttal and arguments, and the court-room had its same attractive coloring.

In the rear of the Court House, in the same park, stood one of the prominent Church edifices, and in this was being constructed a large, new pipe organ. Several times the sheriff had to send one of his bailiffs to quell the noise of hammering during the day. During these visits to the Church the bailiff found Nathan sitting in the organ loft, intently gazing upon the workmen, and now and then looking out toward the court-room, where, could he have known anything, he would have realized that his fate was in the balance. He knew something was astir in the community. He knew the home place had been deserted the day before, and so he had strolled into the church building, from the windows of which he could look upon the crowd in the court-room.

It was unusual for Nathan to be under any roof except his own and in Sam's workshop. Notwith-

standing his musical vagaries, he had not entered any Church or hall where he might touch the keys of an organ.

To-day, instinct must have attracted him toward the Court, and accidentally he found his way into the loft of the Church, where the workmen were just completing the instrument. He watched their every move, and heard every pipe tuned. Time did not concern him.

The trial moved along to a close. In his argument George seemed to move slowly and nervously at first, but once he caught May's eye. Did that give him new courage? Did that marshal the facts for logical presentation? Did that aid his rhetoric?

He did, however, and jury and spectators were alike affected. He pictured Davy Burton in all of his relationships with his fellow-man. Proceeding, he said:

"Can't you, gentlemen of mature years, see that grand old man of our community, a giant of the law, upon horseback, bringing to this Temple of Justice by his service of writs for nearly a half century, obedient neighbors in every cause? Can't you see his kindly nature shedding the rays of its brightness upon the altar in the sacred circle of almost every home that knew and loved him? Can't you see him, in the midst of gay and happy children, enjoying their innocent sports and harmless mirth? Can't you hear, as was his wont in the benediction of family prayer, many an invocation to 'bless Davy Burton' for some godly act of his? Haven't you known him in his regular business habits and customs of carefulness? And yet you are asked to say that he made a will that he was ashamed to request his neighbor, his friend, his counsellor and confidant to witness. In the face of the

testimony you cannot say 'Yes!' when fifty years of the work of his hand appeals to you to say 'No!' when the needless instrument providing for those in whom he knew he was not concerned says 'No!' when the irregularity of the instrument, which in itself would shock his legally tutored mind, says 'No!' and his voice from the spirit land comes back now, resounding through these halls, and exclaims in unanswerable and determined tones—'No!' No, gentlemen, a thousand times NO!"

George had excelled himself, and some imprudent ones in the audience started to applaud, but the bailiff's cry of "Silence!" soon checked it.

The jury took the case, and, not being ready to report, early in the evening they were provided with cots. They agreed on a verdict, sealed it, and retired at midnight.

When the world seemed at rest, strains of the sweetest music came stealing into the apartment in which the jurors were lying. The notes seemed to come from every direction. Whence came they? The heads of several of the jurors hung out of four windows overlooking the park and facing the Church. The new organ! What spirit hand could be so inspired? Darkness alone prevailed within the walls, and the presence of no human being could be observed. They listened and were filled with delight. Soft at times, sweet and far away were the strains, then thundering upon them came the harmonies, as if the heavenly artillery were rolling into space instruments attuned to sublimity of sound, then to die out as softly as a baby's sigh, not to be heard again. What was the cause? Who was the master of the divine art? It was a mystery that

filled them with awe, even as they filed into Court that morning.

"Gentlemen, have you agreed upon a verdict?"

"We have," said the foreman, presenting the answer to the question.

"Is the paper purporting to be a will in the handwriting of Davy Burton?"

"No!"

May was the first to grasp the hand of George, and Ona followed, but as there seemed to be unusual confusion near the door, the Judge, instead of discharging the jury, requested the bailiff to ascertain the cause.

"Your Honor, it is Nathan Thorne. He is anxious to deliver a message to you in person."

"Well, let him in. I'll hear him."

Nathan entered with his hands full of papers.

"Judge, am I too late?" he asked. "Am I too late?"

"Too late for what?"

"To tell you that the will is not Davy Burton's."

"How do you know?" asked the Judge, merely to humor him.

"I know for the best of reasons, even though you all know me as 'Crazy Nathan.' I did it, Judge! I did it, gentlemen of the jury! I did it, bankers, lawyers! I did it, Dick! I did it, old George Vivian! Here's my proof," said he, throwing upon the table pen and papers, which proved to be letters of Davy's written twenty years before.

He disappeared, leaving the assemblage to recover from the startling incident. The jury rendered one more verdict, which had no bearing upon the case, and that was:

"The Midnight Organist was Nathan Thorne!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE VIVIAN IN COUNCIL

"TAKE these old newspapers and burn them," said Mrs. Vivian to her maid a few mornings after the trial.

"Yes, ma'am," said the maid, glancing curiously at the armful handed to her. "They look as if you have been making lace work of them, ma'am. All those little squares cut out. It's a puzzle, isn't it?"

"Bundle up those skirts and dresses I gave you for Mrs. Green," commanded Mrs. Vivian, changing the subject, "and if you'll send word to the seminary in time, her son, Billy, will take them out to her on his way home from school. I guess she needs them, poor woman."

"Yes, ma'am, I'll do so at once," and, going to the clothes room, she utilized the papers in wrapping up several bundles.

"So Mr. Pennington achieved some glory in the Burton Will Case by his Black Art," soliloquized Mrs. Vivian. "I ought to feel kindly toward that man, but I don't. I cannot help my feelings. One more person on my list always rubs me the wrong way, and I have an uncontrollable desire to get even with her; yet I doubt if she ever in all her life did me any wrong. She's too happy, that is the cause of her offending. I cannot understand my nature at all."

In the study, Mr. Vivian and George were conversing.

"I wish to congratulate you, George, on your conduct of the case, and upon your eloquent appeal to the jury," said his father. "I have heard many persons commend it."

"The ending was as good as a play," said George. "I really enjoyed the dramatic denouement. Could you ever conceive of Nathan doing such a thing?"

"Well, my boy, I have studied Nathan many long years and he has done many strange things in his time, but whether in his lucid intervals he ever before did connected work requiring skill of imitating writing I do not recall."

"Do you think he could have done that?" asked George. "Or was his declaration but a wild flight of imagination?"

"I guess he did it," answered Mr. Vivian. "If not, who? Hardgone? No. His daughter? No. Dick? No. Then who? Nathan is always copying music and is a good penman. His backings and inscriptions are amusing at times, yet the execution is marvellous."

"He has kept very quiet and very much indoors since search was made for a will, and the fact of using his backing paper, a heavy yellow, and having so many of Davy's old letters about him—where he obtained them I do not know—and being an imitator in copying, inclines one to the belief that Nathan is the person who has innocently caused all the trouble. He would have been the last person on earth to be suspected. Had he not made such a timely confession, it would have remained always a mystery."

"The jury had no doubt as to forgery," said George,

"but they debated upon that very point—who could have done it?"

"I thought it strange that they took so much time and submitted to an all-night task in very uncomfortable quarters," said Mr. Vivian.

"Did you hear about the other mystery?" asked George.

"No. What was it?"

"The jury was serenaded at midnight by an invisible minstrel, who dedicated that new organ to which you contributed, with the jury, spooks, ghosts, spirits, and owls as listeners. The jurors described it as weird in the extreme. They were under lock and key, and they could not dispatch any one else to seek the player, as the bailiff was asleep down-stairs."

"Who and what was it?"

"When Nathan appeared with his confession they solved it. Nathan was the invisible minstrel."

"That is strange, isn't it? I never knew him to enter the portals of church or house away from the home place."

"The encouragement of his playing upon the real organ, instead of on logs and imitations, may be the means of bringing back his lost memory. What do you think about placing an instrument in his den? It may be a test, if nothing more. As far as the estate affairs go, I advise you now to qualify as administrator. The beneficiaries will consent."

"Very good, George. You prepare the proper petition and I'll qualify. There are a number of things upon my mind that I must impart to you, George. Why I have not done so, I do not know. A father, with sons, is often at fault in such matters of confi-

dence. I cannot realize that you boys are anything but boys."

"You have been a good father, sir, and have now, as always, my love and esteem. Your confidence will be respected when it comes, but as to the time, let that be your pleasure."

"Nothing will be changed at the Burton place," said Mr. Vivian. "Hardgone and Nathan will miss Davy, but as far as they are concerned neither will realize any change from usual customs. Hardgone has always been a good tenant. I can pay monthly an allowance to Mrs. Stokes——"

"And May?" said George.

"I'll leave to you the tracing of the kinship of May and her mother to Davy. They may be entitled to equal benefit. Don't you know, George, that I have had it in mind to do something for that girl ever since I saw her at school upon that day of our visit, but not knowing her mother I have felt a delicacy in offering even her schooling."

"I know that big heart of yours is all right, but until we meet the mother, possibly you had better withhold your benefaction, as people in the profession are proud and peculiar. I heard May say she is going to leave school after this year."

"Very well, then. I leave her welfare in your keeping. If you ever find an opportunity to help her in any way let me know. What do you know about Charles? I seldom see him now."

"Charles is greatly interested in his work," said George, answering the direct question, "and I believe quite popular with his congregation. I might also say that he appears to be especially interested in Ona Leland."

"Ona Leland!"

"Yes," said George. "Why? What is there in the name that gave you such a start?"

"Oh, nothing," hesitatingly responded Mr. Vivian. "It came a little unexpectedly. You see—I had no idea—that—well, you see, her father and I were so intimate that the fact of a Leland and Vivian being sentimentally interested never occurred to me. You have no doubt that it is so?"

"Not if present indications are to be relied on," said George, not wishing to commit himself by a positive assertion. "I think you will be proud of Ona."

"I'd be proud of any choice of you boys in that regard, as you alone are to be pleased, and should it be Ona Leland, why, I'd give them my blessing, of course."

"You are a dear, good father, and I trust you'll live long to enjoy the happiness that you must wish will come to your boys."

"To which I say 'Amen!' But there are so many pages in the Book of Life yet unopened to you that happiness in its fullness will not come to me until we can all read and say 'I understand.'"

CHAPTER XXIX

FORTUNE SMILES ON AN AUTHOR

"ONA, you are looking as pretty as the flowers," said Dick most graciously to his sister, who, attired for a drive, was standing at the front gate.

"Thank you, Dick. You are either blind or sincere, for brothers as a rule see very little to admire in sisters, or, if they perchance do, they make it a point never to speak of it. Tell me, there is some favor you want, isn't there?"

"You behold my sincerity through doubt," answered Dick. "Guess again! I am right, you are wrong, but I'll join you and let you drive me to George Vivian's. Or did you have any other intentions concerning the vacant seat?"

"No. Who would I wish?"

"How can I tell? I'm not a mind reader. I know of a certain rector who'd like to have a call to fill the vacancy."

"Rectors are variable, like other human beings, though I should not feel flattered, as it would be a very ungallant man who would not be pleased to be behind a thoroughbred in a dog-cart," Ona replied, laughingly.

"Then I'll accept the situation, and permit you to take the lines. I'll be guest."

"I'll join you in a visit to George, too," said she, "as I have not seen him since the trial last week."

"He made a big hit, didn't he?"

"Yes. He always wished to play a star part."

"He's all right," said Dick. "I never knew of a nobler fellow. I wanted him to take our case, but he would not do so."

"And he's a friend of yours, too."

"Certainly, but friendship did not enter into the matter. He said his conscience wouldn't let him go against his belief."

"Did he say that? Then it is too evident that he is a young member of the bar. A lawyer with a conscience is unusual."

"No. They all have them, but in some firms they are silent partners."

"Oh, I see," said Ona. "I have had no experience, but mother has repeated to me what father used to say about them."

"Yes, and from what I've heard, father was one of the best patrons the profession ever had. He loved litigation."

"How do you know? Mother says very little about father's affairs."

"The Clerk of the Court told me, that up to his death there was not a docket that did not contain his name on one side or the other."

"Then, Dick, it would seem natural for you to be a limb of the law."

"Yes, but I was cut off when young from that—and everything else, it seems," admitted Dick.

"Oh, well, don't get down. Good times will come by and by," said she, kindly and sincerely.

The letter carrier had just preceded them into George's office.

"Good morning, George," said Dick, presenting

Ona. "The carrier brings the mail; I bring the female."

"Good morning, Ona! I welcome you both."

"Both first- and second-class matter," said Dick.

"Are you referring to Ona and yourself?"

"No, the mail," said Dick. "Open some of it. We'll be interested in the magazines, of course. I thought 'Dr. Frazius' had struck a snag—an air-particle for instance, and had been wrecked." Having removed the covering from the books, he continued, "Ah, there they are. The meeting of the Society; the laboratory; the car; the landing; the capture; the queen of love and beauty. They did accept them!"

"Well I should think so," said George, reading a letter from the publishers. "Check enclosed for \$100. 'Dr. Frazius' a success. Try again. Send address of the illustrator. His style original and attractive."

"That's glorious, isn't it?" exclaimed Ona, clapping her hands. "Oh, Dick, I am so happy!"

"Then, Dick," said George, "there is a check for fifty dollars, the first fruits of an American Doré. I congratulate you with all my heart. I trust we have found you not only a present, but a future."

"I'll accept this as the present, for I really do not feel that I have earned it."

"Well, let us feel that it has been play for both of us, and that luck is our way. Dick, answer the 'phone."

"Hello!" said Dick. "Long distance—New York. Here, George!"

George took the receiver.

"I'll be glad to confer with you," were his concluding words in the 'phone. "You'll arrive this evening, then good-bye!"

"We are all anxiety," said Ona. "Who was it, George?"

"Mr. Fillette, the play-wright. He wants to dramatize 'Dr. Frazius' for a spectacular, and is coming this evening to arrange for it."

"Fame comes crowding upon you," said Ona. "Legal last week; literary this week. How your heads will enlarge. Richard Leland and George Vivian, collaborators."

"Here are nine letters on the subject, several offers, and inquiries 'who is the artist?'" George went on. "Dick, that will be good for you."

"I have you to thank for it," said Dick.

"I have *you* to thank for it," said George. "I did it purely out of the desire, not to advance myself, but to utilize your talent."

"You're always doing something to make somebody happy," said Ona.

"Does Dick think so? I knocked him out, you know, last week."

"Of course he does. Don't you, Dick?"

"Why, certainly I do. I stayed in the game merely to play Hardgone's hand. I gave my word to him, but I want to tell you I nearly keeled over with surprise and delight when Crazy Nathan cleared up the mystery. I believe some people were unkind enough to think that I forged the will."

"The idea!" said Ona indignantly.

"Well, like it or not, Ona," said Dick, "it looked that way if any body wished to be unjust. I was the only person mentioned in it, who was known to be capable of doing it, and for a number of weeks I was daily on the place assisting Hardgone in making the search. It strikes me that it did not take long to point

the hand very straight to 'Dick Leland'—so old Nathan lifted a weight from my shoulders, I can tell you."

"I never heard of that," added George, "though I did make you write, didn't I? I wanted it to refute any accusation, which by circumstances might have come to Dick. That is why I made the request."

"It is all right now—the thing is over"—said Dick, "but I still believe Davy left a will and that it will turn up some day."

"We'll keep up the search," said George.

"Ona," said Dick, entirely changing the subject, "I forgot to tell you that you are causing much annoyance among the younger members of the Vivian family, and it is not the one who is the lawyer."

"In what way?" quickly inquired Ona.

"In this—you have consented to raffle a kiss for the children's fund of the Penny Guild."

"Yes, I have said I would, and so I will. I don't mind a little thing like that."

"But the rector does, and he does not wish you to do it. He says it is wrong from the standpoint of modesty, and then he has private reasons."

"Private reasons?" Ona exclaimed wonderingly.

"Well, Ona, if you don't want to be surprised," said he, "don't you ask him, but if you'll let me manage this it will come out all right, and I am confident that I'll collect quite a sum for your cause. How shall we do? Sell tickets for it? It comes off to-night at the Children's Festival, so I'll make quick business of it. Here comes Charles crossing the street, and he's coming up here. You'd better go into the next room, Ona."

"But the dog-cart? He'll recognize it," said Ona.

"I'll explain that," said Dick. "In—quick!"

She went in and closed the door, just as Charles Vivian approached smilingly and congratulated George on his success in the case, and upon the flattering reception of "Dr. Frazius," and Dick upon the exquisite illustrations.

"As you came in," said Dick, who had signaled George by a wink, "we were talking of this obstinate decision of that very hard-headed sister of mine."

"Rather hard upon your sister, eh, Dick?" said Charles. "I cannot believe that she could merit either of those qualities—'obstinate and hard-headed.' Synonymous, are they not?"

"No, not in her case. One emphasizes the other."

"What provokes such use of terms as applied to her?" asked Charles.

"Well, don't you know that notwithstanding the rebuke you gave her——"

"Oh, Dick," said Charles, "no rebuke, that is too harsh."

"Admonition, then," said Dick. "That is better. She persists in keeping that kiss for raffle at the festival to-night."

"I am very, very sorry," said Charles, "and I would that I could usurp the power over her to prevent it. What does your mother say?"

"She calls her a disobedient girl, and threatened to call you in to reason with her."

"Too late now, though, isn't it?"

"Yes, for tickets are to be provided, and the demand will be great, I know. George takes ten of them——"

"And I'll take the rest," said Charles quickly.

"Can't you arrange that for me, Dick? Then I'll thwart the scheme, and at the same time give the return they anticipate to the fund. We'll say nothing about it, and let the matter drop."

"How about if you are the winner?"

"Then I'll present her with the ticket, in the course of a very pleasant lecture, upon a mistaken sense of duty."

"Which she may not appreciate," said George. "But suppose I win? How about a sense of duty then? It will be mine to kiss Ona, even if I do so in the presence of all the parishioners."

"Do you think that will be kind to her?"

"It is her party, and if I hold a ticket I'm an invited guest to the feast."

"Well, I'll not only forgive, but will envy you, should you win. Go on with your work, now; I want to speak with Dick."

"All right," said Dick. "What is it?"

When near the door, and far enough from George not to be heard, he said to Dick:

"Buy those tickets from George and then Ona can be protected; I'll hold them all."

Dick promised to arrange it satisfactorily, and in the evening, when he called upon Charles, he reported that all the numbers had been secured except one, No. 11, and that no doubt could be reached before the announcement of the drawing. Ona had not been fully advised of the plans, otherwise she would have respected Charles's feelings and withdrawn from such a proceeding on her part. That a stranger might hold the missing number proved a matter of some concern to Charles. Of course, he had only one chance in a hundred, yet chance is chance.

The evening brought a large company of patrons to the festival, and Ona, because of her prominence in the work, and her striking beauty, was the center of attraction. At the proper time, Dick announced that, as Miss Leland, going to the full limit of generosity, had made the offer of a kiss to be raffled for the charity, the drawing would take place at once.

The first number drawn would win. No. 11 came forth. Charles had all except No. 11, and his heart beat with disappointment as he heard the announcement.

"Who holds it? Who is the lucky person?"

It was found that No. 11 was held by Thornton Kearfott, a stranger to the rector!

"It was all wrong, all wrong," said Charles to himself, realizing his guilt in engaging in the traffic of tickets. He could not, therefore, take the liberty of interfering now, as it would subject him to too much comment.

"Thornton Kearfott!" was called by Dick, and the entire assemblage was hushed with interest in the proceedings, to see what swain should have the courage to accept the prize from the lips of the lady herself. The crowd made way for the winner, a pretty, curly-haired boy of five years, attired in a sailor suit.

"Who are you, my little man?" said Dick, as the little fellow handed him a ticket marked 11.

"The prize man," said he.

"Well, sir, what do you want?" Dick asked, holding him up on his shoulder.

"I want to kiss Miss Ona."

"Well, my little admiral, you shall," said Ona, enjoying fully the spirit of the incident.

Then, kissing him, in the presence of everybody,

she continued : "There is no doubt about your victory. You have captured a smack. I hope you'll command a fleet some day."

The audience applauded, and Charles, appreciating that he had been the victim of a very harmless joke, came forward and congratulated his innocent rival.

CHAPTER XXX

A KISS AND WHAT CAME OF IT

On the following morning Charles was seated in his study preparing his next sermon.

"Good morning, Charles! May I come in?" The speaker was Ona, who looked in at the door leading from the parish hall into the study.

"Surely none could be more welcome. You ought to know that. I am very glad to see you."

"Even though I interrupt your study? That ought to vex you a little."

"With some it might, I confess, but not with you, Ona. Besides, it would be quite hypocritical, as I am upon the theme of Charity and Love."

"I am glad then to catch you under the influence of both. We have a meeting of the Penny Guild this morning and I want you to come in to say a few words, then, while you are under the same control, I want to know if you have forgiven me my little escapade last night."

"What have I to forgive? I fear I became *particeps criminis* in being a patron."

"What, you a patron? I am shocked and surprised, that you, my rector, should engage in a raffle."

"I plead guilty, though I must also plead what George would term an 'avoidance.' I sacrificed myself to keep others from doing so."

"Why then didn't you save my dear little sailor boy from his fate? He was a brave little fellow."

"None but the brave deserve the fair," said Charles, laughing, "and I could have said, 'Turn backward Time in your flight; make me a child again, just for to-night.'"

"That is quite poetical, but, truly, had you won the kiss would you have taken it then and there?"

"You embarrass me with a leading question," said Charles, blushing like a girl.

"Come—answer."

"I fear I would have been a coward in your case. I could never have claimed the right by purchase, and had I held the lucky number it should have been payable on demand."

"Whose?" asked she, coyly.

"Mine," said Charles.

"When?" said she.

"Why, you are as cornering as a lawyer at cross-examination," said Charles.

He was relieved by the entrance of Dick, who was carrying a basket of flowering plants.

"Hello—a confessional?" exclaimed Dick.

"Yes," said Ona, "a pivotal one."

"How is that?" said Dick.

"It turns around first on one side then on the other."

"Are you both forgiven yet?"

"Oh," said Charles, "it did not need to go very far for that. Ona was forgiven before she began."

"Let me in on this," said Dick. "When it goes around again stop it at my number."

"Why?" asked Charles.

"Because I have a confession to make."

"To whom?" inquired Charles.

"To both of you," answered Dick; "but first of all

I have brought you these blooms from the Conservatory. Ona thought they might give additional cheer to your pretty study here."

"Not more, Dick, than her presence does," gallantly responded Charles. "I'll place them near me in this window where I shall see them and think of you, Ona. Accept my thanks, Ona."

"I am glad you are pleased. I thought a little more color would harmonize with your other plants," said Ona modestly.

"There now, that little incident was very prettily done, it could not have been more successful had we rehearsed it," said Dick. "Now for my confession. I have stolen some money!"

Charles and Ona started a little at this announcement.

"Dick," said Ona, "you should not joke like that."

"I am not joking," said Dick, "I am in earnest—never more serious in my life."

"Oh, Dick," said Ona, "how could you?"

"There, I cross your hand with a new penny just from the mint," said Dick, handing her the coin. "Now, to begin. Charles, I return to you nine dollars I obtained surreptitiously. You bought ninety tickets for the raffle of a kiss from Ona, and George held the first ten, which I also tried to get from him for you. I had no difficulty in buying them up for you, as they were never issued. I arranged the drawing all right, and gave No. 11 to the pretty boy who won the kiss, and to whom it was delivered in the presence of the assemblage. Merely a little joke, Charles, to gratify you, and spare Ona. Neither of you being cognizant of the fact that you were very innocent victims of a very harmless incident. Though it does

not change the intention of either of you. Ona never flinched from her offer; Charles never changed his determination."

"What was that?" asked Ona.

"That nobody should kiss you on a raffled chance if he could prevent it."

"Why should you wish to prevent it, Charles?" asked Ona.

"Only as your rector," answered Charles, handing her the money. "There, that's yours—for the Penny Guild. Dick has earned it for us, and I cheerfully contribute it."

"No, Charles, I won't permit that. I still think it unfair. You may pay ten pennies, as my sailor boy's offering; he got the kiss; then I'll forgive Dick."

"So will I," said Charles.

"Come, Ona, the ladies are all waiting to have the meeting," called Eleanor St. Clair from the hall.

"Walk in, Mrs. St. Clair," said Charles, rising to greet her. "I am glad to see you."

"Come in, Eleanor, and we'll tell you Dick's latest," said Ona.

Eleanor enjoyed the story very much, and, turning to Dick, said:

"You meant well, Dick, and had a good object in view."

"Yes," said Dick, with a wink at her, "two of them."

"Now," said Eleanor, "I'll tell you something that is not quite so harmless. It concerns forgery of a new kind—anonymous work, not of chirography, but of creation."

"I am always glad to see something new," said Dick.

"So am I," said Charles, "if it is in the right direction."

"Here it is," said Eleanor, producing a very mysterious paper on which was pasted small pieces, cut from newspapers, in lines across the page, so that a continuity of words expressed the thought intended to be conveyed. "Read! And tell me who in our town could be so cruel and so dastardly as to do such a thing."

"To whom was it sent?" asked Charles, examining the document.

"My husband," said Eleanor, "and he very kindly handed it across the breakfast table with no other comment than, 'There, Eleanor, there is something that will interest you.' Read it, Dick, so we can all hear it."

Dick took the paper and read:

"Mr. St. Clair:

Watch your wife. She needs your eye. Her New York trips keep her far in advance of the modest ideas of our quiet little town, and her orgies are the talk of Christian women. She has her tow-line around the Rector of St. Clement's, and will land him, with several others. You are blind. She keeps you so. I pity you, you dear old man. Vigilance should be your motto.

A Sympathizer."

"So you have your line around Charles?" said Dick. "Ah, Charles, you're a sly fellow, you've never shown me that line."

"I have never seen it myself," responded Charles. "It must be one of those invisible hawthers spun from strands of sweet sentiment, so strong that to break it would be impossible, to resist its subtle impelling force, very unnatural."

"Pennington is counted out of this," said Dick, ex-

amining the document. "No expert need apply. Very unique, to say the least."

"Fortunately, it fell into such hands as those of my husband," said Eleanor. "He laughs it off. Others might fight it off. That's the difference. Well, it gives me work to do. I'll find out the artist. Just give me time. Come, Ona, we must get in to our Guild, the ladies are all waiting."

"Yes," said Ona, "you forgot that, didn't you?"

"I confess I did," said Eleanor. "Come, Charles, go in and say something real encouraging to us. Dick, if you say so we'll admit you by special dispensation."

"No," said Dick, "I could not think of troubling you so much. I came for absolution."

"I grant it," said Charles, following the ladies into the meeting.

CHAPTER XXXI

MISSING LINKS OF MEMORY

"An improvisation," said Nathan, looking up from the double deck of keys of his portable organ, to George Vivian, who sat at his right to the front, eagerly watching every expression of the reason-bereft musician.

"Some gentle spirit is whispering in my ear the sounds, while another guides my fingers over the keys. The past materializes and its visions show the conservatories, where the great masters held sway and music—music—music came rushing from every student's brain, through corridor and aisle, filling the air with harmony, until the firmament became a sounding-board to reflect back the tones that bathed the world in sweetness."

"Do you see all that, Nathan?" asked George.

"Yes, yes, oh yes! I can see it!"

"Where is it?"

"I cannot tell. I only know that I feel it. It is somewhere. It was somewhere."

"Where, Nathan? Think—think a moment. Can you recall the people—the building—the city—anything substantial? Something of your home? Something you loved?"

"Listen," said Nathan, returning to the theme of a song without words, being wafted by his skillful fin-

gers nimbly and gracefully gliding up and down the keys.

George was not discouraged, for he fancied that he had seen the light returning slowly to Nathan's mentality since the opportunity had been afforded him of bringing forth real music, instead of the imaginary productions from his log pile, and from the rocks and fences by the roadway.

Since the revelation of the midnight recital, it not only occurred to George that his interesting study of Nathan might be successfully accelerated by the presence of an instrument in his apartment, but his idea had been carried out with much satisfaction to himself and great edification to his patient.

Mr. Vivian, having assumed the administration of the affairs of David Burton, became trustee also in several fiduciary relationships, among which was the serving as committee for Nathan. Hardgone, who had entire charge of the home and farm, became the real guardian of the person, so the run of affairs was very smooth. Nathan's cottage had been enlarged and renovated, which act of disturbance in his realm was not at all appreciated nor understood by Nathan himself, for, fearing that it meant his deposition, he remained steadfast to his post until the completion of the work, which introduced the organ; then his fears were quieted, especially as he was assured by Mr. Vivian that the disturbance was only temporary and was designed for his comfort.

Frequent visits caused George to be more than ever attached to Nathan, and he was the most welcome of his guests. Nathan was not always sociable, nor, in fact, hospitable. He was sensitive at times, and if it occurred to him that visitors had called to see him out

of curiosity, his fingers became inactive and his tongue mute. This was a very gratifying sign to George, for it indicated that the mind of the composer was growing more active in the control of a consciousness of individuality.

Nathan on this occasion continued playing. He seemed never to tire.

"Now for the lullaby," said he, softly producing the strains of the babyhood sounds so familiar to George.

"Yes, Nathan, go on with it. I remember it. I love to recall it," said George.

"I see the nurse and the baby boy. Don't you hear her singing, as he rocks him to and fro, 'Into Dreamland soon you'll go'——?"

"'While I sing you soft and low,' " finished George, as Nathan, pausing, indicated that it was going from him. "Lullaby! That's it, Nathan! That's the old song! Play it again, and again! Do you see the nurse? Do you see the babe? Where, Nathan? Where is the place? Do you see the mother? Where is she?"

His fingers struck the minor chord, as he answered:

"Dead! And every note of this requiem seems to be the sweet pale face of that mother, chiselled out of the cold marble by the hand of Death, and I see there George Vivian."

"Where?" anxiously inquired George.

"Gazing upon that face, and, turning to me, he says: 'Back! Back, thou dastard! Thou shalt not look upon thy work!'"

"Come, Nathan, tell me, where do you see all this?" asked George.

"I see it—in the music—and now I hear the rollicking drinking-song—listen—

"'Drink! Drink! Drink!
Drink the wassail gay;
Dim the cares of day,
Waft the mind away.'

I hold aloft the glass. Through its red liquid all the earth is tinted, and I shout 'Oblivion to all the world! Amidst thy fume, oh, wine, a new creation springs, new beings formed. Come, I quaff thy glorious potion, and sink thy songs.' "

"Where, Nathan, is all this?" George asked, breathlessly.

"In the music I see it. It is the past, marching—marching by as I wave my hand at it and keep time to its unsteady tread. What an army of thoughts! Some in bright shining armor—some so dark—so gloomy—and so sad. Do you hear those grating sounds? It is the turning of keys in locks? Am I free no more?"

"Come, Nathan," pleaded George, observing the increased excitement. "Stop playing now and give yourself a rest."

"I'll never rest until I follow Davy," said Nathan.

"That will be very soon if you keep up such high pressure improvisations as you have indulged in to-day."

"It is my life, my boy. I can't help it. I go into it as the spirit moves me, but, as you wish it, I'll rest awhile, if you call ceasing to think resting."

"No, Nathan, it is not ceasing to think I desire of you, it is beginning to think. That is what I want you to do."

"I think sometimes, but in my own way." As he spoke, Nathan suddenly turned to a subject to which George had not at any time referred.

"Has any will of Davy turned up?" he asked.

"Not yet," said George.

"Mine fooled 'em, didn't it?"

"Some of them, for a time, but it did not deceive the expert eye of Pennington. Did you do that, Nathan?"

"Yes," said he, going to a large portfolio filled with many kinds of manuscripts. "Look in here, and see if you find any testimony against me."

George did so and found not only many specimens of Burton's writing, but many examples of Nathan's work as a penman. "You are quite an artist, Nathan. I did not know you to be so skilled, but never again turn your talent in the wrong direction."

"Was it wrong?"

"Most assuredly."

"I couldn't help it. It was my only hope. I feared the asylum."

"Have no fears any more, Nathan. I will care for you, always."

"Oh, thank you, George, you are so good."

"Nathan, I hope you'll come to know me some time as I really am. Now I'll leave you. Try to think. Unlock the past, Nathan."

"Give me the key, George, and I'll do so."

"The key is in your improvisation."

"Then I'll find it," Nathan answered gravely.

CHAPTER XXXII

NATURE COLLABORATES WITH ART

"ANOTHER wedding anniversary! How quickly they roll around," said Margery Manning, seated in her room, a New York apartment house, which was sufficiently elevated to give a very pretty view of the North River and New York Bay. "Let me see! It is the nineteenth, and here I am in the toils. Married, without a husband; a widow, with a doubt. I have no positive proof that I am a widow. If he lives, am I still in his memory? He was so loyal as a lover; so true as a husband. He loved me and I loved him. What became of him? I have never had any tidings. To him I was lost at sea; that I survived, he could never have learned. They told me at home that broken-hearted he gave up business and left for England, and had never been heard of since leaving Australia. Being dead to him, he did not desert me. To me he is dead, so I did not desert him, and so the years have gone. My life has been a two-part play—one in fiction, one in truth, and my earnings have kept me from want and maintained his child and mine. How proud he'd be of May! He never knew he had a child. She possesses a nobility of character far in excess of her age. I sometimes think I have not appreciated her as she deserves. I have not confided in her as I should have done. I have kept from her the fact that my husband left me in Australia and that

I was to follow him. In her mature years she might think that he deserted me—or that—no, no, not that! She is now eighteen, and I'll tell her all the next time I am at home. Have I not made a sacrifice in keeping her apart from me? I know well my profession and its alluring fascinations for young girls. I know well the whirling existence in this great maelstrom, so I have kept her in the purity and wholesomeness of the country hills, where physically and mentally, she has been reared in strength. But now she is about to be graduated. I must look to her future. I'll see what her greeting is this morning."

Breaking the seal of a familiarly inscribed envelope, she read:

"Mother, darling: I write in haste, to tell you that George Vivian is going to New York with his father on some business connected with the estate of dear old Davy, and I have assured him that it will give you pleasure to see him if he will call upon you, as you know, dear mother, he is so kind to me, though everybody is when it comes to that. I know you'll like him. You can't help it. You should have heard him in the will case. He would have won your heart. He will bear to you tons of love from

Your own,
MAX."

The bell suggested a visitor, and Mr. George Vivian, Jr., was announced. As he entered, Margery rose and gave him a most cordial greeting.

"My dear Mr. Vivian, you are most welcome. A letter from May, which I have just finished, promised me this pleasure."

"The pleasure is mine, Mrs. Manning, and one long anticipated by me," said George, seating himself in the chair his hostess drew forward. "I come direct from your daughter and bring to you, as you may know, the sincerest expressions of her love."

"I feel as if I know you, and I already feel grateful to you for your many acts of kindness to May."

"They are such acts as I could not control; but I am not alone in that, everybody is fond of May."

"It is most gratifying to hear you say so. She is truly a lovable girl. It has been difficult for me to be happy or apart from her, but my engagements are such that I feared the association might take away from May the innocence so becoming to her girlhood. As this is her last school year, I am contemplating some changes in respect to her future."

"I sincerely hope you are not going to rob our little community of her presence."

"I shall consult her wishes, though I believe she will be better prepared now to come into closer touch with the practical world."

"Is she likely to go on the stage?" asked George.

"No, I hope not. It is seldom that a mother in the profession wishes her daughter to tread in her footsteps. I have made up my mind to ring down the curtain upon my histrionic career very soon, and to enjoy the remainder of my days with May."

"The public may not permit it, if all I hear is true, and I am sure it is. But while I am here, may I ask the relationship between you and David Burton?"

"Yes, but it is so distant that in point of disturbing any distribution of his estate I'd hesitate to make any claim. Aunt Cynthia is Davy Burton's half-sister. My grandmother was Davy's aunt, so, you see, I am what may be called several times removed, and May just one time further off."

"Well, I'll make a note of it, and if we give up all hope of ever finding a will, it may be necessary to figure out just how near you are."

"Don't give yourself too much trouble in the matter, Mr. Vivian," said Margery. "We loved Davy very much and I always told him all my woes. As far as his possessions go, I never took the least interest in them. I gave him a number of private papers, which May has told me she has in her keeping, having promised David to deliver them in person. As they are nothing of immediate importance, I have suggested that she will hold them until my usual vacation. Do you know that notwithstanding the many years I have been sojourning there in summer, I have never seen your father, and yet he is the benefactor of the place and its most prominent citizen."

"Well, that is not difficult to account for. It has been his custom to go abroad every summer, as long as I can remember, and even now he is preparing for his usual annual outing."

"He is with you in New York, isn't he?" inquired Margery.

"Yes, he is attending to the exchange of some securities, and registering others—a duty incident to David Burton's death."

"Then I should like to have you both as my guests at the play to-night. You will come, won't you?"

"We had planned to see you in the play."

"I'll telephone immediately, and you'll find the seats awaiting you at the box-office."

None was more interested at the theatre that night than Mr. Vivian and his son George. The stately, martyred *Hester Prynne*, wearing the scarlet letter and bearing her cross, was not the Margery Manning of the morning call. George would not have recognized her at first sight. To him she was a study, most profound. Her soul was in the part, and all of the

power of acting that had made her name famous was apparent to him. He lost not a line of her speeches and watched every change in her facial expression. She was truly a great actress. He was glad that he knew her. He felt prouder of May. Mr. Vivian seemed intent.

Mr. Vivian leaned forward so as not to permit an expression to escape him, until at last, in the scene on the scaffold, when the minister, defying them all, took Hester by the hand and led her to a place by him, and when he uttered the words, "People of New England! At last! At last! I stand upon the spot where seven years since I should have stood."

"George," said Mr. Vivian, "I must go; I don't know how I feel. I am indignant, yet I am forgiving. I can hardly breathe."

"Well, then, father, we must get out into the fresh air," said George. "Your health is more than the close of a play vindicating a wronged woman."

"Hold a moment," said he, "that is just it. That is what I want to see."

Hester stood as a martyr. The minister, pointing to the letter, said:

"God's eye beheld it! Angels pointed at it!" Then in an "aside" he added: "Here is the witness of the red stigma upon my heart!"

"George," said Mr. Vivian, rising from his seat, "I can't stand to see it close. Come, let us leave!"

Then, trembling as a result of their emotions, the two men staggered into the aisle, and left the theatre.

The victory in the play was won, but when Dimmesdale sank down upon the scaffold, Hester fell with him in a dead swoon. Her acting was real; she had fainted!

CHAPTER XXXIII

AN AVOWAL

"GEORGE, really you must pardon me for thus marring your pleasure; but for the life of me I could not help it," said Mr. Vivian when they reached the street. "I felt as if my heart were about to give out."

"Well," said George, "I, too, was interested, but I was quite intent on Hester. You have no idea of the change caused by the make-up from her handsome self. You would not suppose that the Margery Manning of the morning could be the Hester Prynne of the evening. Are you feeling better?"

"Oh, yes. The fresh air brings me quite to myself again, and a good night's rest will make me forget that I have been quite so simple over a play."

The next morning George succeeded in placing "Dr. Frazius" with the dramatist, and in obtaining an engagement for Dick Leland upon one of the prominent journals in its illustrating department. These tidings he did not delay in dispatching to Dick.

Upon George's return home he found a sweet-scented, waxed, monogrammed billet upon his desk. It was as follows:

"Dear George: A farewell to Dick—Three to five Thursday. Quiet and sociable to meet my New York friends.
ELEANOR ST. CLAIR."

"Well, that's pretty good," George muttered. "Dick must have accepted on sight of dispatch, for that dear

kind-hearted St. Clair gives him a farewell. To-day. I'll go, of course. Hello! Three rings—that's mine," said he, going to the 'phone.

"Hello, Eleanor! You, is it? Yes, just received it. I'll drop in. Indeed! Widows, eh? Real? I'll be glad to meet them. Speak to one? Certainly. Ah, Mrs. Morton, glad to meet you, any friend of Mrs. St. Clair is my friend. Our little town is a great contrast to yours, isn't it? I have just returned. Like the quiet, do you? Don't forget, 'Still waters run deep.' The old boy, if you'll pardon me, gets in some very solid work in the small towns. What, another widow? The woods are full. Good morning, Mrs. Windsor! I'll be sure to find you in this afternoon? What, another? Is this a procession? Mrs. Freeman, glad to see you, too. I cannot tell which is the fairest. I know your hostess is difficult to excel. She's a queen in her home; she'll make you very happy. Good-bye!"

"You are right, too," said Dick, who had stolen into the office while George was busy at the 'phone. "I don't know which of the three you'll like the best. They are corkers, George, and as pretty as you'll find in a day's travel. Leave Eleanor for that. She has taste in everything, even in her friends. We had them out yesterday on a coaching party. Ona, Helen, the Colburns, and the Donns made up the party. Big hats, and gay parasols to match. Why, George, we just cut a hole in the air; you should have seen us. Now I've come to thank you for your interest in my welfare. From my heart I do!"

"I predict a great future for you. How does it strike the home folks?"

"Little hard at first. They feel the parting. I

have never been away from them since the death of father. The mention of the big city makes them shudder."

Dick went cheerfully away and George turned to his task.

On his way to the "tea" in the afternoon, George stopped at the Seminary to look in upon Pennington, whom, he regretted to learn, was engaged in a case in New York. He was further informed by the lad at the door that "Miss May is the teacher," so, very naturally, he yielded to a desire to enter, which he did unannounced.

There May stood in front of a great map, with a long stick, very intelligently explaining a subject which puzzled many a public brain—namely, the comparative advantages of the Nicaragua and Panama Canal routes to the Pacific.

Several moments passed before May turned from her map and marked George's entrance.

"Oh, Mr. Vivian, you have taken us by surprise," she said, very prettily blushing.

"I come as a new pupil," he said.

"Then I'll keep you in after school for coming late," retorted May.

"I shall not object," responded George.

"As the class is in such a good humor over Mr. Vivian's call," said May to the pupils, "I'll postpone your decision concerning the canal routes until another time and will permit this department to be dismissed."

"You saw my mother, didn't you?" May asked, eagerly, when her charges were gone.

"Yes, May, I have seen your mother, and I have

no hesitation in confessing to you that I am much in love with her."

"Oh," said May, "I am so glad! I knew you would be. Now, what did you tell her about me?"

"I told her everybody loved you," said George earnestly.

"Did you tell her that? How could you say so, when I know a person this moment who does not."

"Who is that?"

"Mrs. Vivian. And it was on this spot I found it out," said May, recalling the first visit of the Vivians.

"Yes, and on this spot you found out something else, didn't you?" inquired George.

"I believe I did," May answered coyly.

"What was it?" asked George, taking her hand in his.

"That in George Vivian I had a friend."

"Then let him renew that impression to-day, in the same place. Let me assure you that George Vivian will be even nearer to you, if possible, than ever."

"You have always been so kind that I doubt if there is any further comparison in it."

"I want you to feel nearer to me. I want you to confide in me. I want you to believe that I am——"

"A brother?" quickly responded May, in a cordial tone.

"Yes, and even nearer than that—if you will."

"I do not quite understand you," said she, very busy then trying to arrange the desk.

"You said just now that on this spot you learned of some one who did not love you, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Do you think that is so?"

"Well, it seemed so. I hope I do not misjudge her."

"Well, I think you do in a way. She has a kind heart, but a very peculiar disposition."

"I have long since forgiven her, but I keep out of her way."

"But, to return to what I was talking of—now on this spot, please off-set the one who did not love you by one who does."

"Who is that?"

"May," said he, catching her hands, "need I tell you that from the hour I first saw you here I have loved you? That I love you now with all my heart, and will always love you."

Her beautiful face grew crimson. "I don't know what to say," she said, feebly. "I am very happy to have your love; but, George, don't let us talk of it any more just now."

"Why, May, you little darling, you do not know what you ask," said he, most earnestly. "Can I look upon you daily—can I carry your image upon my heart—can I know of your gentle ministrations of kindness and affection on all sides—can I be in your presence, and yet be kept under a ban? Oh, May, you cannot mean it!"

"Yes, that is exactly what I mean, and if you do love me, you'll grant my request. I know I love my mother. I love Aunt Cynthia. I loved Davy very much. And in that same way have I loved you, George, because—because——" her eyes did not fall, nor stare into vacancy, but, looking up at his handsome, manly face, she continued, "because you were my champion upon that first day, and have been my devoted, considerate friend ever since. So what I ask

now is to move on in the serenity of my girlhood, loving you just as I have done, but to be the happier in the knowledge that I am loved by you."

"I'll promise you anything," said George, "and will do everything for your happiness; but if we start out with 'a temporary restraining order,' please do not make it 'perpetual.'"

"That depends, you know—but, come, you have an engagement at Mrs. St. Clair's, haven't you? I'll let you walk with me."

"Well, darling, give me your hand."

She did so, and he raised it to his lips.

"It is a question that will solve itself," he said, gravely.

"We shall see," said May.

"Your mother said that there might be some probability of having you join her in New York after you concluded the seminary duties."

"Did she? Well, it will be very pleasant to be with her."

"I asked if she had a stage future for you. She was most emphatic in her 'no.'"

"I could have answered that," said May. "She has always discouraged it."

"You have unusual talent in that direction. You take after your mother."

"That is indeed a compliment."

"I am quite earnest in saying so."

"I'll be an actress for a time. I have a part to play in real life—a mission to perform, and some time I'll confide in you."

"May, it is your duty to do so now, and, if you love me, you'll do your duty."

"It is because I love you that I do not," said she very feelingly.

"When may I claim the right?"

"When my mission is fulfilled," said she, as they parted at the gate.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE SNAP OF A MOUSE TRAP

Mr. and Mrs. Capron St. Clair
AT HOME

February Twenty-second

from nine to twelve o'clock P. M.

to meet Mrs. Windsor, Mrs. Freeman, and Mrs. Morton of
New York.

THIS invitation created quite a stir, and put society on the *qui vive* for an enjoyable event, as the hospitality of the St. Clairs was well-known and appreciated.

Upon the morning of this national holiday, "Billy" Green was announced and insisted upon seeing Mrs. St. Clair personally.

"Good morning, Billy," said Eleanor.

"I've come from mother, with a hamper of flowers and plants, to say for her as that this is your reception evening she wishes you to accept an offering from her greenhouse in return for your very many acts of kindness to her always. Shall I bring in the hamper?"

"Certainly, bring it right in here, so that I can see it, and you can say to your mother that one may be very fortunate in having many friends, but I have not had an act of kindness touch me so deeply as this of hers."

The flowers were covered with old newspapers; as he laid them aside to disclose the gifts, he continued:

"Mother said also that I should apologize for the poor covering; it was all we had, and that we would not have had that if Mrs. Vivian in her kindness had not wrapped them around a bundle of clothing she sent mother a few weeks ago."

"Make no apologies, my boy. I am just delighted with the flowers. There is nothing I could have received that could be more serviceable, especially this evening. I'll decorate the table with them, and whenever I can I will be pleased to say that your mother sent them."

"That will please her very much," said Billy.

"Jane, show Billy where to put them. I'll gather up the papers. Billy, who cut so many queer little holes in them?"

"I don't know, Ma'am. They were so when they came to us from Mrs. Vivian."

"Heavens, an idea!" exclaimed Eleanor as something strange about the wrapping caught her eye. "Can it be possible? Billy, good morning! Convey my regards to your mother and thank her ever so much; tell her I will do so myself when I see her."

In her study, she went to the desk and took from it the mysterious piece of paper that had been read by her husband and friends at the rectory.

"Now, perhaps, I have the key to the combination, and can unlock the mystery. It may confirm my suspicion, which I have never been so unkind as to breathe to a mortal. 'Sympathize.' An article of condolence ought to have that word. Here 'Obituaries'—and what do I find? The word 'sympathize' missing and in its place a parallelogram of space, with which my

word in the wonderful document exactly coincides. Now, I have begun. The ending will not be so difficult. And so, Mrs. Vivian, every little piece in this artistic collection points to you, my lady! Each newspaper has upon it your address, 'The Oaks,' and that of Mr. Vivian. They, by positive proof, were sent from there to old Mrs. Green. Fate brought them from Mrs. Green to me. Circumstantial—but straight! Yet, I can't believe it."

Eleanor was somewhat disturbed by the incident of the morning, though she tried to banish the thought of it. Would she be forced to play hypocrite and extend a cordial welcome to the suspected person who was expected to be a guest in her home within a few hours? For the sake of the boys and the father, she would sacrifice her own feelings.

"Rose Cliff," the spacious and palatial St. Clair residence, shed brilliancy from every window, and the strains of music gave token of the good cheer within. Mr. and Mrs. St. Clair received the guests and introduced them to the receiving party that stood in line assisting in the honors of the occasion. Mr. St. Clair, stately and handsome, was most cordial in his greetings, and gave evidence of his pride, as he presented every newcomer, to his radiantly beautiful wife. May, as a favor to Mrs. St. Clair, was in her place in the pink corner, and looked like the pretty flower that gave name to the innocent refreshment she so gracefully served—"Rose Sherbet"—having no greater patron than George, who was perfectly willing to reduce the temperature of his "interior department" to freezing-point, in order to keep near May, without attracting unusual comment. Ona poured coffee, and it was whispered around very generally,

that the Episcopal minister drank very many more cups of coffee than any of the other clergymen present. Mr. and Mrs. Vivian were greeted in the course of the evening by host and hostess. Amid so much happiness, Eleanor cherished no malice, but felt rather pleased to stand beside Mr. St. Clair in welcoming Mrs. Vivian.

When the evening was waning and some of the guests had begun to make their adieus, Eleanor became ill-at-ease, and excused herself for a few moments. In her boudoir she sat several moments in thought; then, starting in a determined manner for her desk, she said:

"I'll do it."

She touched the bell. Jane soon appeared.

"Jane, tell Mrs. Vivian that I would like to see her."

A few moments later Mrs. Vivian entered.

"You have sent for me," she said.

"Yes, Mrs. Vivian, I am about to do a most uncharitable and inhospitable act in disturbing your pleasure to impose upon you an unpleasant task."

"I am sure, Mrs. St. Clair, it should be no unpleasant task to serve so genial a hostess."

"I have something to confess."

"Not to me?"

"Yes, to you. As you are the wife of Mr. Vivian, and the acknowledged leader of society, I must have your advice."

"Well, I'll gladly give it to you."

"Then sit down and listen. You know I am a woman of a happy temperament—that I delight in giving pleasure to others. I have discovered that a serpent has crept into this house with the sinister de-

sign of making trouble between my husband and myself."

"You speak in riddles, Mrs. St. Clair."

"Look at this," handing her the paper. "Read it. Who could possess the heartless cruelty to thus endeavor to assassinate affection?"

"I do not comprehend."

"Read it. You'll see what I mean."

"How does it concern me?" asked Mrs. Vivian.

"Only as my advisor, Mrs. Vivian. You have said you'd gladly serve me, so look at it. See if you cannot find the serpent creeping through it, and coiling its folds around each little word, and every square of paper."

"It is ingenious, to say the least, and very original," coolly commented Mrs. Vivian, though a tell-tale flush had suffused her face, "but who could have done it?"

"That's just it. Is it not my duty to find out who in our community is thus preying upon domestic happiness?"

"If you feel that way about it, I think it is most assuredly your duty to visit upon the author just retribution; but you must first catch the guilty party, the other will follow."

"Well, I wish to confess further to you that I am very nearly accomplishing the first."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. Vivian.

"Yes," said Eleanor, producing the newspapers, "look at these and tell me if I am very far from the offender?"

"What do you mean by that?" asked Mrs. Vivian.

"Look at those papers! Tell me who has cut them in this manner. Look at your name, Mrs. Vivian!

Look at this ingenious arrangement of those severed words! Who did it?"

"Why, really, I cannot say."

"Mrs. Vivian, you lie!"

"Mrs. St. Clair, do you mean to insult me in your own house?"

"Insult you? I will not pretend to do so."

"There is nothing for me to do but go at once from your inhospitable roof, Madam," said Mrs. Vivian, rising to leave.

"Stop, Mrs. Vivian!" commanded Eleanor, standing between her and the door. "I charge you with that base work, and if you do not confess it here to me, I'll go below and denounce you before the whole company. I'll bring remorse to that good husband of yours, and mortification to my two dearest friends—your step-sons. So I leave it to you to save yourself and them. Will you confess, or shall I go?"

"What will you have me do?"

"Sit there at my desk and write as I dictate."

"Proceed," said Mrs. Vivian, sullenly.

"I confess that I am guilty of the anonymous letter, manufactured from clippings. What is in the letter is without foundation. Now, sign it."

Mrs. Vivian did so, and, turning to her hostess, said:

"Mrs. St. Clair, forgive me!"

Then she fainted.

Mrs. St. Clair placed her upon a couch and told Jane to tell Mr. Vivian that his wife was indisposed and wished to go home.

Eleanor never disclosed her secret.

CHAPTER XXXV

PREPARATIONS FOR A JOURNEY

GEORGE, while seated in his office next morning, was surprised by a call from Charles and Mr. Vivian.

"George," said Mr. Vivian, "I have decided to go abroad much sooner than I expected."

"Why is that?" George asked.

"You know I intended going a little later. Mrs. Vivian had a return of her heart trouble last night, however, and we believe an ocean voyage will be beneficial."

"When do you start?" asked George.

"I can't say definitely. Travel just now is unusually great. I doubt if we can get berths. Call up New York and see."

"All right. What line?"

"The American."

George used the long distance telephone and in a few moments said, "You're in luck!—a room for two has just been turned in."

"What is the sailing date?"

"Next Wednesday."

"Close it—check by mail," quickly added Mr. Vivian. "Well, boys," he continued, "it seems now that my going is inevitable. I never cross the water without preparing for the 'other shore.' My will is in my safe. I have tried to make it just. In it are a number of trusts to be administered. The death of my old friend Burton added another. Nathan is one of the

responsibilities. I have set apart a separate account in your charge, George, that you may not be at all embarrassed in his maintenance. Charles, I hand you these papers under cover. Davy, poor fellow, met his death rescuing them. They will be of service to you should I not return. There are some things in my life which have been kept from you boys. A memorandum you'll find with my will. You have been faithful sons to me and my heart is full of affection for you. What progress are you making with Nathan, George."

"Well, sir, I do feel very much encouraged," answered George.

"He's improving, that's sure! We'll find some developments there, George, before long," said Mr. Vivian.

"Then I will have mastered a theory in his case," answered George.

"How often do you see him?" asked Mr. Vivian.

"Every day or so. I am cautious about my attentions. The half-demented are sensitive people. They are quick at suspicions, and slow at parting with them. So far, I have been *persona grata* with him, when all others are *non grata*. May Manning, who seems to wear a charm that draws everybody to her, loses none of her power over him. She is always welcome. She has been the dedicatee of hundreds of his compositions and improvisations."

"An attractive girl, truly," said Mr. Vivian, "and I confess that the charm has worked with me from the day I first saw her."

"I am glad to hear it," interposed George. She has captured me, and I hope some day to make her my wife."

"Why, George," said Mr. Vivian, "this is rather a premature confession, isn't it? She is not out of school yet."

"In a few months she will be graduated," explained George.

"George, is this a fancy, or are you in earnest," asked Mr. Vivian seriously. "Don't play with her, my boy. She's young and susceptible of first impressions, no doubt, which may, in her case, be very deep. I'd hate to hear of George Vivian bringing a pang to her heart, or tears to her eyes."

"Trust me for that, sir."

"What of her father, George? Is there not some mystery about him?" continued Mr. Vivian.

"He is dead, I suppose."

"Her father has never been known by any one here, nor heard of in fact," said Mr. Vivian. "Old Burton, who was slightly related to the mother, could not give any information of him, and was of the opinion that he had passed away before this mother and child came from across the sea."

"Well, that settles it as far as I am concerned," said George, hoping to avoid a discussion.

"It occurs to me that you might hesitate in a heart-alliance when the origin of the girl is in doubt. Did it ever occur to you?"

"No, I confess it never did."

"How do you know that Manning is her name?"

"I will give her a name about which there is no doubt."

"Well, my boy," said Mr. Vivian, "since you were born your happiness has been my pleasure. Whatever you desire shall have my sanction. Whoever you bring to me as your wife shall have my blessing."

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE QUEEN OF THE MAY

WHEN Mr. Vivian with his wife left for Europe he gave George *carte blanche* to do the honors at "The Oaks," and in accordance with his father's suggestion George decided to give a Garden Party, to which not only parents, but children, were invited. The boys and girls of the Seminary were requested to arrange a real, old-time May-Day Festival.

It had long been George's intention to present "As You Like It," in which he could essay the rôle of "Orlando," with May as "Rosalind." The old actors in the Elks' Home volunteered to assist, so with the exception of the seminary girls and May, and Ona, who was to do "Celia," and himself, the remainder of the cast was filled by experienced professional people.

The spacious grounds surrounding the homestead were well-adapted by nature for the purpose, and a natural amphitheatre, with a background of foliage, supplied an ideal stage, in front of which a gently sloping hillside made an auditorium.

Rehearsals, as usual, were most enjoyable, and afforded close association and happy opportunities for May and George. The first day of the month of flowers dawned brightly, and every arrangement was complete for a gala occasion. The May Pole, with its hanging streamers of varied bright colors, was raised in the centre of the ground ready for the dance, and,

here and there, in shaded nooks, stood tents or booths from which refreshments were served. The brass band from a neighboring village, gratified at the opportunity, accepted the invitation to rehearse in public, and drummed out many popular airs.

May was selected as the "Queen." The youngest of the seminary girls approached the throne at the beginning of the ceremonies to formally crown her "Queen of May."

The pole-dance was prettily executed, and then May prepared to assume her other rôle.

After the children's games, the entire assemblage witnessed a novel and most creditable rendition of scenes from "As You Like It."

The wrestling scene, in which the contestants were matched in height and weight, proved to be wrestling in earnest. For a time there was much doubt as to whether "Charles, the Wrestler," or "Orlando" would go down, despite the fact that the Bard of Avon had provided for the success of "Orlando."

Charles was none other than Dick Leland, who had come for the purpose of surprising George. Both were athletes, and warmed by the excitement of the match they came very nearly forgetting that the play had a plot, and that there was some respect due to the author.

Ona, as "Celia" had to lose a sister's identity, and utter the thought against Dick, "I would I were invisible to catch the strong fellow by the leg."

Many of the innocent-minded old people, who had never witnessed a stage production, thought that George and Dick were in earnest.

"Rosalind," in boy's clothes in the Forest of Arden, at first shocked, then delighted them, for May, being a

pretty girl, made a most attractive boy. She revealed an exquisite form in such an exceedingly modest manner, that she became the *pièce de résistance*, while George proved himself to be an actor of exceptional ability, and those schooled in the art complimented him highly.

Eleanor St. Clair, assisted by Mrs. Leland, was so much engaged in playing the part of hostess, which greatly relieved George of the burden, that she did not mingle much in the entertainment part of the programme, though she was cognizant of the appearance of Dick in the play.

Nathan was there, seated on a rustic bench, in his harmless enjoyment of the band, which had no auditor quite as absorbed in appreciation as this reasonbereft fellow. He improvised a baton from a twig and beat the time, which the leader himself followed instead of waving his cornet in the air at the most impressive passages. Long, well-filled tables were spread under the trees and bountifully met the demands constantly made upon them.

May, transformed into her girlish self, from her boy's attire, made herself most agreeable in entertaining, though she was kept busy responding to congratulations. Ona looked so pretty in her picturesque and appropriate dress, of a shepherdess, that she was prevailed upon not to change it. It had a charm about it that caused Charles to follow her, as a lamb might have done, into the forest, where she had but an hour before found an "Oliver." They were scarcely seated when Mrs. White and Dick sauntered by.

"Hello!" said Dick, espying Ona and Charles. "A Forest of Arden! A shepherdess and her Crook!"

"Dick," said Ona, "you do not improve with age. You grow worse."

"Oh, pardon me," said Dick. "It is Charles, isn't it?"

"Yes, Dick," said he, "and glad to welcome you back. How do you like your work in the great city?"

"Immensely."

"I have kept watch, and so familiar am I with your style that I can easily tell it from others."

"I have been devoting so much time to Cuba and the Philippines that I hardly know how to cartoon my own people. I have been doing well in my off-time at the new fad—ornamental posters—and 'ad.' pages for magazines in black and white. I don't know how I can ever thank you and George for the start. However, if you ever see anything in my family you'd like to have, just take it."

"Don't be so silly, Dick," said Ona.

"I may take you at your word, Dick," said Charles, "and you'd be sorry if you could not maintain the generosity of the offer. Then you would feel badly. Don't you think so, Mrs. White?"

"If so," said she, "it would be the first time, for he is a compound of stoicism. Nothing disconcerts him."

"Come, Helen," said Dick, "'disconcerts' is our cue to exit," and they were soon lost in the throng.

"Ona, you look so pretty that I'd like to keep you always as a little shepherdess," said Charles.

"For such a compliment from you, I'd love to be, on one condition—that I might always count you as one of my flock," promptly responded Ona.

"The only one?" asked Charles.

"That depends."

"Upon me, I know. At last I take courage from

'Oliver'—that 'but seeing I love, and loving woo,' and, thanks to 'Orlando,' say to thee, O Celia,

"These trees shall be my books,
And in their barks my thoughts I'll character;
That every eye which in this forest looks
Shall see thy virtue witness'd everywhere."

"That is very pretty," said Ona, unmoved. "How well you know the lines. Is this in the play, or are you in earnest?"

"In earnest, Ona."

"Do you mean this, Charles, or am I still playing 'Celia,' alone in the forest with 'Oliver'?"

"It is not playing. I have been happier since you came into my life. I shall be still happier if you'll become a part of it. Will you do this?"

He took her hands, and looked into her eyes, as he eagerly strove to read the word that trembled on her lips.

"Yes!"

"Bless your heart for that 'yes.' Upon it a new life begins. A future is assured, and the rectory will soon become a realm of love and the rector of St. Clements will achieve the crowning work of his career in presenting to his parishioners a queen of all the parish."

"I trust she will meet your every expectation," responded Ona.

"With God's good-will she shall," earnestly replied Charles.

"Come, you two people," cried May merrily, as she suddenly appeared to this very much interested pair. "Fear not, 'tis Rosalind. What are you doing, Mr. Charles—making love verses to my 'Celia' in the forest?"

"You are a good guesser, May," said Charles. "You know that there are plays, and plays—some upon the stage—some in real life. 'As You Like It' was made for us—years ago. 'As We Like It' is original with us—made now, and came like an inspiration from above, and as you are the first to witness our play—Ona, shall I tell her?"

"Yes," said she, "if you wish to do so."

"Ona is to be my wife."

"Is it so, Ona?" exclaimed May, as if half-daring to doubt her rector.

"Yes, May, it is so."

"Then I kiss you, Ona," said May, "and give you my blessing."

Eleanor and Dick, not suspecting the two-part play, came upon them in a gay mood.

"Charles," said Eleanor, "I have brought you a dispatch—just received. Dick says it is a cablegram."

"Ah," said Charles, "greetings from father!"

"What's the matter, Charles?" asked Eleanor, "I fear your 'Ganymede' has been the bearer of ill-news."

"Yes," said Charles, passing the dispatch for the inspection of those about him. "The rose is not without its thorn; the sunshine not without its shadow. Our gratitude for to-day's pleasure must now be united with sympathy for our bereaved father. We'll not mingle further in the pleasures, yet will not curtail the happiness of others, but as the sun goes down and the guests are parting, I will make public the announcement of the sudden death of Mrs. Vivian."

When the strains of "Home, Sweet Home" indicated that the festival was at an end, Charles mounted the throne on which May had been crowned, and said:

"My friends, I would that the pleasant recollections

of the happy day might go with each and every one of you to your homes, but I cannot refrain from admonishing you of the uncertainty of life, as indicated by this cablegram we have just received: 'Mrs. Vivian died to-day,' it says. From your hearts and ours I'll send across the sea expressions of sympathy."

CHAPTER XXXVII

MARGERY'S HOMECOMING

"MOTHER is coming to-day!" said May to Eleanor, as she finished reading the letter she had just received at the Post Office, where by chance they had met. In small places the Post Office is a popular rendezvous, where many of the fair sex are accustomed to await the arrival of the mails, and exchange social gossip.

"Yes, she is coming by the next train, and I'm on the way now to meet her," continued May. "The season closed last week, and all her arrangements for next year having been made, she hopes to enjoy a long holiday with me. I want you to know her better, Mrs. St. Clair."

"Indeed, May," said Eleanor, "I assure you that it has always been my desire to be better acquainted, as I have long admired her; but she has kept so retired that I have not dared to intrude upon her."

"You know how odd the people are here," responded May. "Mother's occupation seems to be an unpardonable offence. I think she is very sensitive upon that and another subject, so she has been quite content to make a recluse of herself with Aunt Cynthia and myself."

"Her devotion to you is beautiful," responded Eleanor, "and that goes to my heart. I'll get into her affection myself this time and let her expand her ideas as to at least one of your friends here."

"I have written often about your kindness to me, so you have her regard already, though I know she'll love you for yourself."

"So it seems."

"By the way," interposed May, changing the subject, but unconsciously continuing it as far as it was in coincidence with Eleanor's thoughts, "did you send any expression of condolence to Mr. Vivian?"

"No," said Eleanor. "Where is Mr. Vivian now?"

"In Australia by this time. He received my letter in London, answered it on the ship and mailed it at the first stopping port out. He said he had some important business which developed since his arrival in London, and would have to make the long journey. He may be away a year. I am sorry, as I wanted him to be present at our Commencement next week. Don't you know he was mindful enough about it to wish me success!"

"Mr. Vivian is surely a fine man and has my profound respect. I have always doubted his happiness since the marriage, which brought the last wife to 'The Oaks,' and I may be cruel—you'll forgive me, May—for congratulating rather than condoling with him."

They had walked and talked as far as Mrs. St. Clair's home.

"As it is nearly train-time," continued May, "why not continue with me and greet mother. I know she will be pleased."

"Gladly will I do so, if you'll not consider it an intrusion. I'll order the automobile and we'll give her a royal welcome. Now, as I am permitted to witness the meeting of mother and daughter, is there any one else you'd like to have enjoy the pleasure?"

"Yes," said May, but not without blushing.

"I know," quickly added Eleanor. "I spell the name in the color. I'll telephone to him."

George, consequently, was on the lookout, for as they drew up at the sidewalk in front of his office he was waiting for them.

"George," said May, "I have a surprise for you. Mother is coming, and we want you to join us in greeting her."

Margery stepped from the car into May's arms, and, for a moment, might have felt that it would have been happier had May been alone, but when George, with his solicitude for her, and Eleanor, with her kindly nature, drew about her, she had to confess to herself that a very happy chord had been touched.

Her appearance was prepossessing, her manner sweetly gracious, and her apparel so rich and handsome that Eleanor admitted to George, after they had left May and her mother at May's home, that she was one of the most charming persons she had ever met.

"May tells me that Mr. Vivian has gone to Australia and may not return for many months," said Eleanor.

"Yes, so I am advised. The letter to Charles was for both of us."

"Did you get the particulars of Mrs. Vivian's death?"

"Yes; it was comparatively sudden. They were crossing the Channel. She was sea-sick, as so many usually are, and had a fainting spell on the train on which she was travelling to London. Heart-failure carried her off the following day. She was interred beside my mother in the family lot. My father's trip

to Australia was not anticipated; unforeseen business required his presence."

Having arrived at "Rose Cliff," Mrs. St. Clair prevailed upon George to accept an invitation to dine with her.

When May had talked of everything in which Margery could possibly be interested, not omitting the approaching graduation, and a number of very pleasant references to George, she brought to her the envelope which she promised Davy to place in her hands. It was a surprise package for both of them, as there was something more of import in the contents than even Margery anticipated. She knew she had confided to his keeping several letters bearing upon her marriage, and supposed that in his caution he wished them to be in her possession. The first paper encountered after breaking the seal was "The Last Will and Testament of David Burton," which was the document to which Sam Tanner referred when he told George that he had witnessed a will.

"Why, mother," said May, "here's Davy's will! George said that he knew Davy had made one, and that it would turn up some time. Now here it is! Just think, too, we could have saved that trial had we known of this genuine document."

"True," said Margery; "but blame not yourself. I thought I knew the contents, and as I had no immediate use for these letters I left them with you."

"Dear old Uncle Davy," said May, "and for these you sacrificed your life!"

"How is that?" said Margery.

"Why, had he not insisted upon returning into the smoking building he would not have been suffocated. In his hand was this package which he had rescued."

They did not need any further evidence of his generosity to increase their devotion to the memory of their dead relative, but when the will was perused by Margery, their hearts filled with gratitude, as, besides a substantial bequest to Cynthia Stokes and herself, he devised the residue of his estate to May. This included the home place on which he lived. He referred to the trusts for Nathan, and named as executor George Vivian, Sr.

"Blessings upon Davy's memory!" said Margery. "We will endeavor always to be grateful for his bounty. We'll give this to George. He'll act in his father's absence. Now, May, the time has arrived in your life when, as your mother, I should impart to you something of your birth."

"Davy told me all he knew, and I vowed then to find my father if he is in existence. Now I recall it, he said to me that he had made a slight provision to assist me in my purpose."

"As a child I told you nothing, for I could not utter an untruth and tell you your father is dead, if I did not know. I could not say to you, your father deserted me, as I do not believe he did; and you were not old enough to understand; so the matter became a sealed book with me all these years, knowing that at some time we'd break the seal. Your mind developed as you grew older, and it suddenly dawned upon me that May—my own child—might imagine that her mother was wearing 'a scarlet letter' in reality."

"God forbid, mother! You know I wrote you, that my life has been marked with a cross of mystery that it seems nothing can eradicate, so submission has been my philosophy."

"You are a child of wedlock, under the most sacred

banns of the Church. Your father was a gentleman of means and standing, and the name to which you are entitled by every right is Mary Morton. He did not desert me. This letter, among the others saved, is a proof of his love and tender regard and solicitude for me, his wife, and for you, whom he never knew. He had been away from Sydney, in London, for several months, and wrote from there. How I kept these links in the chain I do not know, but they come shining forth to prove to you, May, the devotion of your father to me and the love of your mother for him. Now, listen," said she, reading from the letter to which she referred:

"My dear wife:

"There are so many miles between us, that Time has seemed to grow into years instead of months, since I parted with your loving self. These trips are something more than a Sabbath Day's journey, and, since my arrival, I find business affairs connected with the mercantile branch somewhat mixed; besides, family matters, in which a near relative is concerned, need the immediate supervision of some one clear-headed; and while assuming that such does not belong exclusively to me, yet I am prevailed upon to take part in the adjustment, which must of necessity prolong my stay. I do so conditionally, that you, my darling wife, must be with me, and "as coming events cast their" rays, in our case, not "shadows" "before," I apprehend a sea-voyage will be most salutary for you. So you must come to me. About the time of your receipt of this communication, our ship "Sea Bird" will be in commission for the trip, making a stop at Rio *en route*. This will give you a long, but no doubt beneficial, outing. I enclose an order for one hundred pounds, and instructions for your passage. Advise of your sailing. Awaiting with anxious heart your coming, bespeaking a safe voyage, and praying God's blessing upon you, I am Your devoted husband,

"'GEORGE.'"

"George what?" inquired May.

"George Morton."

"What was the business?"

"Mercantile—Morton & Co.,—Sydney."

"What then? I am over anxious, mother dear."

"I sailed," said Margery. "You know the rest. In the Pacific the ship went to pieces in a storm. Lashed to a mast, I drifted ashore—where I don't know—on an island out of the course. Many months I spent in the hospital, during which time you were born. Few ships going in either direction touched there, so I was cut off from the world, and it was just one year after the 'Sea Bird' sailed upon its ill-fated voyage that by a merchantman I was landed again—at home, as I thought. I found no husband—no business house—and all I could learn was that, broken-hearted at the loss of his wife, and discouraged at the loss of ship and cargo, George Morton never returned. My letters came back undelivered, so I reconciled myself to the fact that your father—my husband—was dead."

"What then?" again asked May, anxiously.

"My means had vanished, and, having no capital, save my talent, I adopted the stage and assumed the name of Margery Manning; you being so young, I deemed it better to try to forget Morton, and so I named you May Manning. I signed with an American company to come to the States. Knowing of our relatives, Davy and Cynthia, I came here and arranged for your comfort, and so I have plodded and plodded and saved, and, thanks be to God, both you and your mother are to-day beyond want."

"It's like a play, isn't it?" cried May. "Romantic and dramatic! What a sacrificing mother you've been, and I can say with you—bless my father's memory."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

MATERNAL LIFE

MAY felt not a little pride as she escorted her handsome mother up the aisle the next morning at St. Clement's. Many heads bent towards each other in whispers, and a commotion, as of some unusual happening, was evidently going on in a very quiet way. An actress in Church was a thing difficult for some devoted persons to understand. When Charles, kneeling, intoned, in his clear ringing voice, "from envy, hatred and malice, and all uncharitableness"—how many of those about him, disturbed by Margery's presence, responded, "Good Lord, deliver us"?

Many out of curiosity, and others by reason of love for May, went to the rectory where Margery, much against her taste and desire, held an informal reception. Her occupation never interfered with Church duties, and her unostentatious devotion to St. Clement's for many years had been marked by numberless offerings.

Charles was aware of her generosity, as he never had to appeal in vain in behalf of any Parish need, so he was sincere in his welcome and cordial in his greeting. George escorted May and her mother, and renewed the friendship begun upon his visit to the latter at the metropolis.

"I am just dying to tell you something, George," said May.

"Well, what is this wonderful something you have to tell?"

"It will keep—so I'll wait until to-morrow. No business on Sunday, George."

"Well," said he, "my curiosity is now quite high, so I shall pray that to-morrow will be hastened in order that I may be enlightened."

As he was going to dine at Ona's with Charles, he did not linger, though it would have been his preference to do so.

"I'd like to know the length, breadth, and depth of that heart of yours," said May's mother. "Can you tell me if there's room for another?"

"What do you mean?"

"George! Isn't he trying to get in?"

"Trying? Why, mother, George is already in."

"I thought so. Now tell me, if I am in, and he is in, can you define our respective positions?"

"You know, mother, you have my whole heart——"

"If that is so, what part has George?"

"He has my whole heart, too——"

"How can that be? You upon the verge of graduating, too. Can you so divide a thing, that giving the whole to one, the whole still remains for another?"

"It is contrary to rules of division, I know, but so it seems. There must be two hearts in one—one yours—one his—taking yours away lessens not his—taking his away lessens not yours. Oh, mother! You understand. I love you both, but in a different way."

"That is just what I wish to know. Do you love George sufficiently to trust your future in his keeping?"

"I have not yet thought of that. It has been such a new relation to me. He did ask if I'd be his wife——"

"What did you say to that?"

"I told him I would not reply until—until——"

"Until what?" interposed Margery.

"Until I could say, 'This is my father.'"

"Then, my child, you may never be his wife."

"Oh, don't say that, mother!"

"Well, child, don't borrow grief."

CHAPTER XXXIX

HOW A NEW LIGHT BEGAN TO BREAK

"AND so you are a little heiress?" said George to May, as she came in from the academy, she having left Davy Burton's will with him on her way to school in the morning.

"I don't know so much about that," said May. "Am I?"

"Davy left a considerable estate, and after substantially remembering your Aunt Cynthia, his half-sister, during her life, and your mother, the residue is left to my father in trust for you. It also provides for the management of the trusts in which Nathan is beneficiary. Now, are you not glad that I told you that I loved you?"

"Why so? Didn't I, in return, make a confession to you? Are you not also glad?"

"Truly. But you know now that I love you for yourself, and that your good-fortune does not hasten the confession, nor increase the love, in proportion."

"My confidence is well-founded," responded May. "I trust you, and never could believe any equation in your affection. Indeed, it is all so new to me that I feel as if it must be a dream."

"You are struggling to get awake, are you?"

"Do you observe any spasmodic efforts?"

"No, you are the same, sweet, self-possessed, little girl as always, dreaming or waking, and I do love

you. 'As father qualified before he went away, the estate matters can remain just as they are until his return."

"I wrote to him in Australia," said May, "upon another matter."

"I hope he'll get your letter. His stay is so uncertain. He went in the interest of some mines which had long since been abandoned by some relative, as I understand it."

"I hope it will reach him there, as I wish him to get some information for me."

"About your father?"

"Yes. It behooves me to begin the task upon which I have set my heart and you must aid me whenever and wherever you can. I should think you ought to be very much interested."

"I am—for two reasons—first because you are so interested, and second, I am not unmindful of our future."

"Oh, George, you understand me! The subject of my father has always been a delicate one. I could not discuss it with you. Our love has made me bolder, and I do not hesitate to enlist you in my search."

"May, for your sake, I trust that some time tidings may come to you to rest your mind, at least, but as far as I am concerned my love is so near-sighted that it sees nothing beyond you."

"Oh, you generous, blinded fellow! Will it always be so?"

"God willing, it shall be," said George fervently.

"What more should I desire to assure me of happiness? If I were entirely selfish I could answer nothing, but——" May hesitated, as she had never before discussed the subject with George and did not wish to

censure, even in thought, her good mother. "Don't you think mothers must have difficulty in reasoning just how far daughters shall be taken into their confidence?"

"Now you are asking for an opinion that it is out of my line to give," said George. "I never knew a mother; I never had a sister."

"If my father is living, is the world so large that I cannot find him?"

"This is no small world, May," said George. "Suppose you do find him?"

"Then I could lift a weight from mother's heart."

"Well, come, let us go out to your estate, and look at the tenants. My regular call is due to Nathan."

"I have not seen him for a long time," said May, "so it will be a pleasure. How is he getting along in his struggle to break through the darkness?"

"I am much encouraged, I confess, and I now believe that eventually he'll be himself again."

As they approached the cottage, strains of music met them, and George was struck by the familiar air.

"Hark!" said he, "I believe it is the 'Lullaby.' At last it has come to him!"

"Truly remarkable!" said May. "We'll go in quietly so as not to break this connection with the past."

Nathan was absorbed in his music, so he did not see them when they entered. It was very tempting for May and George to break in with their greeting, but George thought it more diplomatic to permit Nathan to speak first, though he seemed so far away, that patience was put to test, and George knocked over a chair so that he could attract his attention. This startled him, but did not stop his playing.

"Wait! Wait!" said he. "I am watching the prattling babies in their sweet innocence take the rocking car for dreamland, and about them angels are humming an obligato while the Muse sings the lullaby. 'Now they're off to sleep—sweet sleep!' There! I have recalled the past."

"I am so glad," said George. "We are both here to rejoice with you."

"Glad to see you both," said Nathan. "I have been so busy——"

"Composing new music?" asked May.

"Not exactly new music, but I have been holding a reception with old friends, and old music."

"Where from?" asked George.

"That does not seem to come to me. George, how long have I lived here?"

"That I don't know. My brother and I were a number of years at college, and you were here when I returned."

"It is a blank to me, but again I trod the halls of Eton, sat under the shadow of Stoke Pogis, and with Gray heard 'the curfew toll the knell of parting day.' I have bowed my head in the old Chapel at Cambridge, and elbowed my fellows in Oxford. The conservatory, the Cathedral, the choir, the home—all have passed before me as in a dream. The wassail, the revel, grief, tears, wife—what a maelstrom? So that is why I am busy—trying to straighten it out. Where's your father, George?"

"In Australia."

"Australia? I have heard of that some time, haven't I?"

"I judge so."

"May, I enjoyed your 'Rosalind'—few prettier, May. You'd make a fine boy!"

"Thank you, Nathan. I'd prefer to be a girl."

"In love?"

"Yes," answered May, somewhat embarrassed by Nathan's direct manner of interrogating.

"With whom? George?"

"Yes."

"George, do you love her?" asked Nathan, turning to George.

"Yes. You don't blame me, do you?"

"No. I hope you do. Going to marry her?"

"I hope so, with all my heart, but that depends upon her."

"It does. Well, young lady, if you are loved by my boy George—I say my boy because of his constancy, his faithfulness to me—don't place any obstacle in the way of his marriage."

"Oh, Nathan! You are very kind, but it is not time yet for me to think of marrying—I am still in school."

"Graduate soon, don't you?"

"In a few days now."

"Where's your mother?"

"Here."

"Did she give up playing?"

"No."

"Davy loved her."

"Yes, and she loved Davy. Who didn't?"

"Where's your father? Did he ever turn up?"

"Not yet, Nathan," responded May, to encourage him, but surprised at the various turns of his thoughts.

"I hope he will for your sake. Your mother's a good woman. This skeleton should not annoy her."

May looked at George, but he was powerless to stop the lead Nathan had in the interview, and, while he was so very personal, yet it pleased him that the mental machinery was beginning to work in so many directions.

"George, Mrs. Vivian died, didn't she?"

"Yes."

"For the best. Depend upon it. It never occurred to me that there was any too much love at 'The Oaks.' Who provides for me now?"

"I do, Nathan," said George.

"Davy fixed it, did he?"

"Yes, transferred the trust to my father, and left his estate to May."

"Is that so? Then, May, I'm your tenant by sufferance."

"That being so, rest assured, Nathan, you shall never be disturbed in your occupancy."

"I'll keep you both in my prayers," said Nathan.

CHAPTER XL

A SWEET GIRL GRADUATE

A DIPLOMA—a floral feast—pretty May—proud Margery—happy George—and smiling friends. Commencement was ended and May had been graduated.

“Isn’t this an odd piece?” said Ona, pointing to an elk’s head with branching antlers made of immortelles.

“Yes,” answered May, “and that is a tribute of which I am proud.”

“What is it?”

“Read the card. ‘The Elk’s Home to its Little Angel.’ Now isn’t that sweet of those fellows in the Park. See here—a bunch of ‘Forget-Me-Nots’ suspended around the neck with a piece of purple ribbon. The color and the flower of the Order. I don’t deserve all this kindness.”

“I guess you do, May,” said Ona, “for everybody loves you. Here comes old Sam. He too wishes to greet you.”

“I cannot resist congratulating you, Miss May,” said Sam, approaching. “Many a stitch I have made for those little feet since you have been going to school. I saw you open your books here, so I thought I’d come and see you close them. I liked your thoughts to-day in your paper—‘The Strangeness of Truth.’ If it is so to you now, what will it be when you’ve lived as long as I have?”

"Sam, I appreciate your thought of me more than I can tell, and I thank you for your congratulations. Though my book is closed here, as you say, yet I have a real book now to open."

"Yes, Miss May," continued Sam, "life is a book of many chapters, some of which are beaming with smiles, and some are wet with tears."

"The latter I'll try to skip, Sam."

"I trust you can, Miss, but none has ever done so yet. Here comes Nathan. How many of his chapters have been naught but blank pages!"

"Ah, Nathan," said May, advancing to greet him, "I am glad to see you."

"Thanks, May," said Nathan, calmly and rationally. "I have been much impressed. My college days come back, and my old sheepskin opened like a scroll before me. Much I saw written thereon. I hope your life will have in it no blank spaces."

"I thank you for such a wish, Nathan."

"Well, May," said George, joining the trio, "with the boys as soon as you are out of school?"

"Pretty old boys, George," said Sam.

"With young hearts, anyhow," answered May.

"Bless you, Miss, may you be ever happy as you are to-day," said Sam, as he moved off with Nathan.

"Now, permit me to thank you for something, and to chide you a little for doing it," said May, seriously.

"What is it?" inquired George, suspecting the cause.

"This," said she, showing him a large bank bill attached to a card, bearing the inscription "From a friend."

"I say immediately, 'Not guilty.'"

"Now, George! Don't deny it, if you did it, as I

accept the intention, and I'd rather be under obligation to you than to any other person."

"Indeed, May, I'm telling the truth."

"No one could have done so but you, you know that."

"I do not—but here comes Charles with Ona. Maybe, he's the culprit."

"I dislike to ask him, George."

"Don't mind him; he's all right! I'll prepare the way. Here, Charles, come and exonerate me!"

"What is it?"

"May accuses me of generosity."

"An inestimable quality," answered Charles.

"Then it does not belong to me," said George.

"What, May, a burden upon a day like this," said Charles.

"Not very great," said May. "I'm trying to find my unknown friend who bestows generous gifts and cuts off an expression of gratitude. Can say 'I am the friend'?"

"Not exactly, May," said Charles, "but I fear I am accessory before the fact, and, if accused of knowing something of it, cannot plead innocence."

"To whom am I indebted?"

"My father," said Charles. "He left directions for it prior to his sailing."

"Dear, kind man! How lovely in him to be so thoughtful."

"Yes," said Charles, "that's father's way. He would prefer not to be known in any beneficent act of his."

"Well, I am truly grateful, and shall surely make most befitting acknowledgments to him, though I want you to keep it."

"No, no, my child, it is for you, so make use of it. Summer hat—summer suit—you'll find a place to do with it much good."

"Then—the thought occurs to me that it would please him——"

"If you'd use it in a manner to bring happiness to you."

"Then I do give it to you."

"No, no," said Charles.

"Yes," continued May, "to place a memorial window in St. Clement's Church to dear old Davy Burton."

"I know father's intention," said Charles, "was that you should be at full liberty to use this gift in any manner that should please you—never supposing for a moment but that it should gratify some personal desire."

"Well, this is a personal desire," responded May, "and it gives me great happiness to make such a tribute to our Church, and such a memorial to Davy. Is he not worthy of it?"

"Oh, there's no question about that. It shall also be a memorial to something besides Davy."

"What is that, please?" asked May.

"To the unselfish nature of a very sweet girl," said Charles with enthusiasm. "I feel quite sure that my father will commend your offering, and that you will find yourself ingratiated deeper in his esteem."

"I shall feel proud of that, I am sure, for indeed I feel myself loving him anyhow—for the sake of George."

"Ah, I see," said Charles, "for George's sake."

"Well, for his own then—too," responded May.

"You have not made a father-confessor of me, but it seems that George stands in high favor with you."

"So do you, don't you?"

"I hope I do, and always will—but George leads by several degrees."

"Yes, by exactly the same number that you lead him in Ona's favor."

"Now you have given me an equation to work out."

"Don't lose much time on it, as I declare to you that George is the dearest fellow in the world to me, and I do not have to prove it by algebra."

"As candid as it is lovely," said Charles.

"Thank you," said May with a smile, "but what about the window? Are you going to accept the offer?"

"If you insist, I'll yield, but are you quite sure there is nothing else that will give you more pleasure?"

"Nothing."

"Then your wish becomes law."

"When does Mr. Vivian return?" asked May.

"I cannot say. He may surprise us at any time. It has never been his habit to confide his movements to us boys. When we were young he never thought of doing so, and as we've grown older he has not departed from his early custom."

"Well, I'll charge you with the duty," said May, placing in his hand an envelope, "and here is my offering, which I freely give, as a grateful acknowledgment to Mr. Vivian—a memorial to Davy—and as an ornament to St. Clement's."

"A little benefactress, truly, and I thank you in behalf of all of my people."

"Come, May," said Mrs. St. Clair, hastily coming

upon them. "We are all going to my home where I have arranged for you a modest welcome into the world, and you can there have a reception all your own."

"Mother"—began May, about to interpose an excuse.

"Have no concern about mother," said Eleanor, anticipating her, "she has consented, so run out there and get in the auto beside her, and when we are there the rest will follow. I have invited all your friends."

"The world would be happier," said Charles, "if there were more Eleanor St. Clairs in it."

CHAPTER XLI

HOW A HOME WAS LOST AND FOUND

MAY was not idle during the many months which followed her graduation, even though much of her time was spent in New York City with her mother. She succeeded in corresponding with several parts of England, as well as with far-off Australia, though very little light shed its beams upon her hopes, for the very sparse tidings were only discouragements. Margery tried to dissuade her from further inquiry, and George pled with her to give up the will-o'-the-wisp engagement, and turn her undivided thought to the one in which he was so heartily interested. She did not yield entirely to his wish, even though she was somewhat dismayed, but in her heart kept a spark of hope always lighted.

Margery's apartments became quite a rendezvous since this new attraction appeared. Dick Leland found a place which seemed home-like in the great city, and George, during the season, was frequently called to New York on business!

May had enlisted in her service Mr. Pennington, who, during his brief visits to New York, found the Manning flat an objective point. He had originated a clue, which, though it seemed absurd, in fact, almost preposterous, he did not hesitate to confide to May. Her correspondence brought to her many specimens of handwriting, which she was impelled to submit to

Paul with a grasping-at-straws-hope in the matter. The idea was her own conception.

Paul's love of his art and affection for May made his task a very happy one. His comparison led to remarkable similarities, and, though he had no faith in miracles, yet he felt that if there could be deception in demonstration, his art which had been so trustworthy up to the present time must lose his regard and become a matter of guess-work. His faith prevailed, and when May opened a telegram and read the words "It is identical," she was tempted to fly to Paul to see for herself the premises that reached the conclusion conveyed in the vague words. The season closed and in a few days they returned home.

Mr. Vivian, whose plans, unforeseen, had kept him more than a year away, surprised them all, as Charles said he would, by his unexpected arrival. His first duty was to qualify as the executor of the Burton will, and take May under his guardianship. When Charles showed him the memorial window—a gift from May—by the means of his gift to her—he was deeply touched, and gratified at her unselfish spirit. He remarked that "she shall not regret such a graceful act of generosity on her part."

When they were seated in the cozy library of the rectory, Charles handed Mr. Vivian the large package of papers committed to his care, to be opened by him conditionally.

"Father," said he, "your return, for which God be praised, relieves me from breaking the seal of confidence you had in me, and I now place in your hands again this package, trusting that many years may come to you before any of the documents therein contained may be available."

"Kind—very kind, Charles," responded Mr. Vivian, opening the package, "but there is a paper which is now available and in which, no doubt, from what I hear, you will feel some interest."

"What is that, sir?"

"Look over this certificate of title," said he, handing Charles an official looking document, and while he read it Mr. Vivian could not help but note the changing expressions of his face, and the rise of some color.

"Well, sir, what next?"

"Here," said he, in reply, "is a deed from Richard Leland to me prior to his marriage in settlement of some partnership matters, in which the entire estate is conveyed in fee, containing, however, a conditional user clause of twenty-five years occupation by him and his heirs. The twenty-five years expired the day Davy rescued the papers."

"Then by virtue of this deed you are now the owner of the Leland property, and Mrs. Leland and Ona are without a home?"

"So it seems," said Mr. Vivian.

"Is Mrs. Leland aware of this trust estate?"

"I cannot say. If Leland never informed her, I did not. I fear I have not been very communicative in my affairs, even to you, my son. Our life has somewhat lacked continuity. Your mother died about the time of your birth. You and George were given in charge of a nurse. I was engrossed in business in this country and abroad, and for very much of the time I have been so apart from you that I am surprised that you can have the affection for me that you have. Leland and myself engaged in a business enterprise of exportation; I managed in London, he in

New York; at first very successfully. Then reverses came, and I saved his credit, taking in consideration this deed. Through the instigation of Leland, I settled here. 'The Oaks' belonged originally to his family, and it came to me in a trade shortly after my arrival. So I came very near getting all they possessed."

"This will be a sad blow for Ona and her mother," said Charles. "Of course, you are going to maintain your rights?"

"Well, I don't know. I am like a court divided in its opinion."

"They have nothing to do but yield—if you are obdurate—appreciating though that it is a legacy from the father and not of their own making. If you'll permit me, in all sincerity, I'd like to propose a substitute, which will not embarrass you, and will save many, many tears."

"My son, did you ever know me to make tears if I could cause smiles in their place? Have you ever yet known me to be guilty of an unkind act? Have I ever been overbearing in asserting rights to the oppression of the weak?"

"No, my good father, I never have, for to me you have been nobleness itself."

"I am glad I have been an example in this respect for you two boys. What is the proposition that occurred to you?"

"It is such a delicate subject that I really hesitate to speak upon it. Children with any sense of refinement always refrain from discussing with a father the disposition of his estate, as it seems cold—very, very cold—to anticipate his passing away."

"I realize that the latter incident of life is inevita-

ble, so feel perfectly free to disclose what is on your mind."

"It is this. You are blessed with plenty. I am confident that your love for me will cause you to make me a sharer in your bounty."

"You are quite right, my son, and I admire the considerate manner in which you refer to it."

"Well, I offer this suggestion. In lieu of any bequest to me that you may have in your mind, give me that deed. You know that Ona has consented to be my wife, and that it would hurt her heart and pride to have to realize that the roof over their heads is but a sufferance from my father. You can appreciate the situation, can't you?"

"Oh, yes, and I do not propose to place my son, or the woman he loves, as I suppose you do, in such a position. So, there, you take this deed as the original, and accept the whole estate as a wedding-gift. I'll make a quit deed of conveyance in accordance with this act."

"Oh, sir, I am more than grateful, but ask that you make me still happier by conveying it to Ona, and it shall always be her separate estate."

"I'll do as you wish most cheerfully. The deed shall be made to Ona Leland, and shall be of record on the day of your marriage—before she becomes Mrs. Charles Vivian."

"My dear father! May God bless you!"

"Now that concludes in a very happy manner an undisclosed chapter in my life's-book."

"If there are others, I wish that you may soon find for each a happy termination."

"I go now to read another chapter, the title of which is Nathan Thorne," said he, hastily departing.

It proved to be a lengthy one, as also a satisfactory one. The lights were lit at "The Oaks" when he returned.

CHAPTER XLII

A FAIR DETECTIVE

MAY was not the happiest girl in the world, as she sat in the library waiting for Mr. Vivian. Her mind was disturbed; her heart was full of trouble; and the future, which seemed bright in its prospects, was now so clouded that life seemed to be shrouded in a pall.

"Mr. Vivian," said she, advancing to greet him, "I am happy to welcome you home from your long trip abroad, and for several reasons have taken the liberty of intruding upon you for a few moments here."

"May, don't be so formal in your speech," said Mr. Vivian, taking both of her hands in his. "You know you do not intrude, as there is no one who could be more welcome to 'The Oaks,' and I want you to feel so always. I am your guardian, that establishes a near relationship. You are George's fiancée, that brings you still nearer. So never apologize for being in your guardian's house. It shall be your right; besides, it will make me always happy to have you here."

"Thank you, sir," said May, much reassured by the kindness in his tone, and the tenderness in his manner of receiving her. "I have thanked you in my letters for your generous gift to me at graduating."

"Don't mention it, as that was my pleasure," said he.

"I took a liberty, I fear, of putting it to a use which may not meet your approval, but it was my pleasure."

"Then it meets my approval."

"I felt grateful to Davy—and to you, and——"

"Charles told me all about it," said Mr. Vivian, interrupting, "and he showed me the beautiful window. I am proud of you. You spoke of letters. Did you write to me in Australia?"

"Yes. Didn't you hear from me there? Were you not at Sydney?"

"Yes, but I spent most of the time in the mountains, with a continued change of address, so your letters must have gone astray."

"I am so sorry," said May. "I told you the story of mother's life and mine in those letters, and prayed that you might find for me some traces of my father."

"Believe me, child, I would have done anything to serve you, or your mother. By the way, strange as it may seem, do you know that I have never to my knowledge seen your mother except as 'Hester Prynne.' Where is she now?"

"Here at Aunt Cynthia's."

"Ask her, May, if I may be permitted to pay my respects to her. I'll gladly do so."

"Indeed, sir, she'll be pleased to see you, and I think you'd like her; she is so lovable. Besides, as my guardian, you should know her; and then too, sir, if nothing happens to prevent, she may some time be George's mother-in-law——"

"Then I know she'll need my advice and sympathy," said Mr. Vivian, smiling.

"Don't say that, for George is such a good fellow. I think mother loves him already."

"He is truly a good boy," agreed Mr. Vivian.

"Mr. Vivian," said May, after a short pause, "may I speak to you freely? May I confide in you?"

"Of course, my child, just as if I were your father," said he, becoming much interested. "Don't hesitate; go on."

"Well, I told George that I could not consent to be his wife until I could say: 'Here is my father,' or could produce proof of his death. I hoped on your return to present such proofs that would convince of the latter, for I cannot believe him to be living—unless—unless——"

"Unless what?"

"Oh, only a thought—but you did not get my letter, you could not make inquiry, and the hope I indulged is dashed to earth, as have been many others."

"I am very sorry," said he, "as no doubt I could have been of service—of course, I could. You say your father lived in Sydney?"

"Yes."

"What was his name?"

"George Morton—the representative and head of the house of Morton and Company, Exporters." Mr. Vivian started involuntarily and exclaimed:

"Your mother's name?"

"Margery Coke—I think," said she, hesitating.

"Don't you know?" said he eagerly.

"Only what I was told."

"Yes—of course—only what you were told. Who told you?"

"Davy Burton. My mother never, until about a year ago, just before I graduated, confided to me that secret."

"Tell me, please, more of this," said he quickly.

May grew eloquent in the relation of the romantic story of her life, and the incidents which led to her

birth in a strange land, the loss beyond recovery of her father, and the fate which brought them to America.

"In Heaven's name, girl," said he, when she had finished the narration, "who told you such a thrilling string of impossibilities?"

"It does seem so, doesn't it?" said she. "I believe it, however, because my mother told me."

"She told you. Of course, you must believe her. Have you any proof other than what she said—anything to show—if ever requested to do so? Any one could manufacture a romance, you know, and make it quite as thrilling. Try to think now. Isn't there something?"

"Yes, sir," said May, taking the letter written from London from her portmanteau with some other papers. "Here's a letter written by my father, requesting mother to join him in London, and giving instructions how to do so."

Mr. Vivian was still so excited over the story that he could not keep the paper steady enough to read it.

"Here, Mr. Vivian, I'll read it to you. You are not naturally nervous, are you?"

"No, not always, but I confess the strange story quite absorbed me, even to unnerving me."

"There, sir," said she, finishing the reading of the letter, "is something convincing."

"Yes," said he, "it is proof that somebody in London, evidently a husband, wished his wife to join him there. It may have been written by the husband, or by somebody for him. That is not conclusive at all."

May's hopes went away down, as she depended so largely upon that letter in pursuing her clue.

"How did my mother get it, if not from her husband, Mr. Vivian? Oh, don't say there's nothing in

that letter. It has been the hope to which I have clung, trusting that it might lead some day to something tangible. Let me ask, where were you then? Look at the date."

"I was, if I remember correctly, in London. But that does not help the matter, does it?"

"No, of course not. Why did I ask it?" said May. "Forgive me if I ask silly questions."

"Ask what you please," said Mr. Vivian. "You do not know how anxious I am for the truth."

"Here's another paper," said she.

"What is it?"

"Your letter to me from London——"

"Acknowledging yours, which I appreciated so much," said Mr. Vivian. "Your thoughts were like rays of sunshine breaking through clouds."

"Mr. Pennington saw these letters," continued May, "and was astonished at the similarity of the writing, which led me to hope that his theory might prove correct, and that you might be the means of imparting tidings of my father."

"What is that?" said Mr. Vivian, excitedly. "Fudge! Fudge! A visionary theory—that is all—nothing practical in it!"

"It does look alike, doesn't it?" hopefully continued May, placing them side by side. "I have studied every line, every characteristic, every shade, every dot and crossing, until I have made myself believe it; so, forgive me if I wrong you, Mr. Vivian, but for God's sake look at it closely; don't turn it aside! Did you ever know a George Morton? Did you ever write a letter for such a person?"

Mr. Vivian, with an uncontrollable agitation, arose from his chair and took several strides across the

room, then came up to the desk upon which were the letters, and, placing his hand upon them, said :

"Leave these with me, May. Where's your mother?"

"At Aunt Cynthia's, as I told you."

"Yes, I know, but I am really bewildered; you have strangely affected me. I must see her, and will go now. Come!"

His hands trembled visibly as he rose.

"Give me your hand, May, I am quite dizzy. It is only a passing weakness—nothing more."

"Don't think of disturbing yourself; I am very sorry if I have caused it. Pray, let me bring her to you in the morning."

"Well, say to her that I'll eagerly wait her coming in the morning. There's George on the step; say nothing to him."

"The secret shall be mine, Mr. Vivian, until you tell it."

"I trust you," said he, kissing her hand.

CHAPTER XLIII

A TANGLED SKEIN OF RELATIONSHIP

NATHAN was the first visitor at "The Oaks" next morning, and was cordially greeted by Mr. Vivian as he was ushered into the spacious reception-hall.

"Welcome, Nathan," said Mr. Vivian, "I fear you'll find me a dull host this morning, as my sleep last night was not at all refreshing. Our long interview must have had a trying effect upon my nerves."

"I am sorry for that," said Nathan.

"I did the talking, you know," said Mr. Vivian.

"Yes, it was a series of revelations to me," admitted Nathan.

"There are others, Nathan. The denouement is not yet reached. When I went away I realized that you were returning from your long, long visit into the unexplainable, but I had no idea that I'd find you so composedly settled in your regained self."

"Those years," said Nathan, "will always be a blank to me in many regards, but there are some rifts in the clouds."

"I am glad that you came to see me to-day, Nathan, as I have resolved to unburden myself, and disclose a secret known now only by myself, and which Burton knew, but never divulged. I propose to proclaim your true name, and bestow upon you rights of which you have been deprived all these years."

"Through no fault of yours, George, and I'd rather if it please you be always known as Nathan Thorne."

"Let me be the judge of that," replied Mr. Vivian, "I gave you the name, and I can take it away. Not a word to anybody. Here comes May. I have some business with her. Step into the drawing-room and make yourself at home."

"Good morning, May!" said Mr. Vivian, as she came bounding up the piazza steps.

"Oh, Mr. Vivian," said she cheerily, "I have been so anxious for the time to pass. I could hardly wait for the moment to come to you."

"Well, my little detective, now that you are here, come in and pursue your vocation," said he, leading her into the library. The letters were on the desk in a position that indicated recent attention.

"Mr. Vivian," said May, observing the letters side by side. "I put you to studying, did I?"

"No, not to studying," said he, "but thinking. Did your mother consent to come to 'The Oaks'?"

"Yes, sir, she yielded to George, who argued her out of standing upon ceremony in the matter, and so after calling upon Charles at the rectory they will be here."

"I am very glad she is coming," said he. "I am filled with an indescribable anxiety to see her. Have you no more facts than you presented last night, which have any bearing upon your life?"

"I told you all," said May, "but you received it as hearsay, and I went home discouraged, as I felt the slight impression my story made upon you."

"Not slight, May, I assure you, for all night long I weighed the evidence, and repeated to myself your story again and again. In fact, it made so great an impression that I fear it lacks but one thing to make it real."

"What I have omitted," said May, "mother will gladly supply. Did you look at the letters?"

"Look at them?" said he, earnestly. "I devoured every word—I analyzed every line."

"Yes—yes—and——"

"They are," said Mr. Vivian slowly——

"Identical," said May, not trusting him to complete his reply.

"Suppose I deny it—what then?"

"Oh, Mr. Vivian, you won't deny it. If it is so, you won't deny it, will you? Why should you?"

Mr. Vivian went to the door to see if they were quite alone, then approaching her, grasped both of her hands, and looking straight into her bright eyes, sparkling with tears, he said:

"In the name of Heaven, can this be so?"

"Tell me, Mr. Vivian, did you not write that letter?" said she, breaking away from him and seizing the paper—suddenly putting to him the direct question, which almost staggered him. "Gratify me, Mr. Vivian. If I am wrong, I must know it. If I am right—then I demand it as a right to know it."

"Then, my girl, you shall know. I confess I did write the letter."

"For my father?"

"Yes, for your father."

"Oh, Mr. Vivian, then you know him. Tell me everything about him? Where is he—where can I find him?"

"My child! My child! Here!"

"What, you? You my father?" and she fell half-fainting into his arms.

"How grateful I am," said she, soon recovering,

"that mother saved that letter from the wreck, and Davy Burton rescued it from the flames."

"Which brave act," added Mr. Vivian, "preserved his will, making you an heiress, and this letter which is the contributory means of giving to you a father."

"I hope this is not a dream."

"No, no, my girl, it is not a dream. It is an awakening from a mystery equally as incomprehensible as sleep. So, awake, my child, to a new life, a new relationship, and take into your young heart a new being, take into your love a new love, and draw about you the tender protection of a father-love, than which there is none more sacred nor sincere except the love of a mother."

"I am just everything that is joyful," said May, then suddenly exclaimed, "But Heavens!——"

"What is it?" said Mr. Vivian, at her sudden exclamation. "What is it?"

"I find a father. I must give up George."

"Don't let us have any tears in our present happiness, May. Let us rejoice that the lost is found, and delight in the goodness of God who divines all things."

"If you are my father, then George is my half-brother!"

"I really believe that after all your striving you are beginning to regret that your father has at last been found."

"No, no, don't say that—only, Mr. Vivian—a father is such a strange thing to me, while George is not. I know you'll forgive me for feeling so. George loves me and I love him—now——" she broke down with girlish sobs, in which there seemed to be actual grief—"now, I can only be his sister——"

"Dry your tears, quickly," said Mr. Vivian, "for I hear footsteps!"

"You stand there," said she, placing him beside the desk, "just where the light can be upon you. Have you changed much in all these years?"

"No, I think not, though a man can never notice the changes in appearances wrought by Time. If they are marked, he is slow to admit them. I think I look slightly older, though not so much or I should have heard some comment from the boys. You have seen me often, what is your opinion?"

"You do not seem changed much—as far as I can remember. Mother looks about the same to me."

"She was very pretty."

"She's pretty now," said May, quickly. "Here they come! I'll greet them! you stand there."

She rushed out to meet them. "Oh, I am glad you have come! I do want you to know Mr. Vivian, mother. He will not be strange to you; he will seem like an old friend."

Turning to George, she could not resist clasping his hand, and said impulsively:

"George, love me always, won't you?"

"Why, certainly—you schoolgirl—what is the matter with you?"

"Promise me! No matter what happens, you'll love me, won't you?"

"I promise," said George to please her.

"Mr. Vivian is in the library. Come in!"

Charles and George stood back to permit Margery to enter.

"Mr. Vivian," said May, "this is my mother."

An exchange of glances was sufficient.

"Margery!" cried Mr. Vivian.

"George!" gasped Margery; and they were in each other's arms.

May wept, and Charles and George stood mystified, until May went to George and further astounded him.

"George," said she, taking him by the hand and leading him to Mr. Vivian, "this is my father!"

"Yes, my boys," said Mr. Vivian, "another chapter in my life you've never realized."

"Then, May, if this is your father and mine—you are—my——"

"Sister," said May.

"And, being my sister, cannot be my——"

"Wife," said May. "Though I lose a husband, I gain a father and two brothers."

"Well," said Mr. Vivian, "let me make you happy, and give you also a husband."

"Worker of miracles—what next?" asked George.

"This," said Mr. Vivian, leading in Nathan, who came from the drawing-room at that moment.

"George, I have a confession to make to you. I am not your father, but your uncle."

"Who is my father, then?"

"My brother—Nathan Thorne—and I now present him to you as Nathaniel Thorne Vivian."

"If this be true," said George, placing his hand in Nathan's, "I gain two fathers, and a sweet little wife, who seemed but a moment ago losing herself in a dear little sister."

"In Heaven's name, father," said Charles, "where is this to stop? Tell me who I am?"

"You are my devoted son, Charles Vivian, and George is no less a son, as he has known no father but me, even though I restore to him to-day one who has a greater claim upon him than I have."

"George," said Nathan, "you are a benefactor; you give to me a good brother, and a noble son, to whom I am in great part indebted for the return of reason—that boon which is equal to the breath of life itself."

"Boys," said Mr. Vivian, "you have witnessed an incident which seems nothing short of a miracle, and realized developments which affect us all. Charles, when I went abroad I gave to you, among some important papers, a confession which tells the story of a life filled with romance and strange experiences. I crave your pardon for not imparting to you all the acts of a father. The confession may show extenuating elements that will bring to me the forgiveness of you, my sons—for so you shall ever be—and you, Margery, my wife, for *that* you are in the sight of Heaven!"

CHAPTER XLIV

A CONFESSION

"**HERE** is the paper," said Mr. Vivian. "Please read it for us, Charles."

Charles took it and began:

"There is a question in my mind whether or not, in the sincerest of human beings, influenced by surroundings and circumstances, and inspired by the best motives, there is not a slight element of hypocrisy and deception. Society has gone so far by usage as to sanction a certain degree of falsehood, which sits lightly on conscience, and causes no serious concern among those accustomed to it. Then there is a certain confidential relation one has with himself which time cements until it becomes such a fixed condition that it never occurs as probable that a disclosure might affect other interests, however remote.

"If I have wronged either of you boys, or kept from you aught that in any way has had any bearing whatsoever upon the moulding of your character, or turning destiny upon its course, forgive me. Though Fate has diverged our paths, you have been constantly in my mind, and your situation and welfare has ever been an object of solicitude and always within my comprehension.

"Several incidents in my life were not disclosed, one, especially, because of pride, if I must admit, and another because you were too young to understand.

The matter was sad, and of such short duration that I concluded in after-years not to burden you with it. Now I am going abroad. The chances of the deep are ever uncertain, so if I do not return, remember, Charles, that my spirit will hover about you when you are reading this—my confession——’ ”

“Charles,” said Mr. Vivian, interrupting, “I did not surely expect to be present, at your reading, in the form of such a substantial materialization.”

“There are other substantial forms,” said May, “whom you did not have any reason to believe could be present either.”

“True, my child,” said Mr. Vivian. “A miracle! Pardon the interruption, Charles, I could not help it. Proceed, my dear boy.”

Charles resumed the reading.

“‘George Vivian, Sr., married Elizabeth Harcourt Morton, the daughter of Sir Nathaniel Morton, who had been knighted by favor of the Queen for excellence and renown in music and dramatic literature. Two sons, George and Nathaniel, made the union happy, George being the senior of Nathan by three years. Eton, Oxford, and Cambridge opened their doors to these boys, and neither institution had occasion to regret having fostered them.

“‘I yielded to mercantile inducements to enter the world. Nathan inherited the musical talent of his distinguished grandfather, and the conservatories of Italy, Germany, and France never had a more promising student. His name was becoming renowned and his compositions, which are played by artists to-day in concert, cathedral, and conservatory, hold a place among the classics. I fell in love with Florence Aglionby Goldsborough, an only daughter of The

Honorable William Hastings Goldsborough, M. P., a young lady with beauty and other substantial attractions. This lady became Mrs. George Vivian, and your mother, Charles. Nathan married a very handsome girl—Miriam Sybil Weatherstone, a prima donna known as “Fioretta.” Drink caused Nathan to forget his good name, “Fioretta” and his art. To each mother was born a boy—Charles first, by two years—my son; George, the son of Nathan. Both the mothers died in the same year—Fioretta, broken-hearted. Nathan became hopelessly insane. I was appointed his guardian.

“I adopted George. Business enterprises, vast in extent and not unprofitable, occupied my time. In America, an importing and exporting house was established. I became associated with Mr. Richard Leland, through whose inducement I was led to settle here and become possessed of “The Oaks,” to which home you boys were brought, when quite young, and placed under the care of your faithful nurse, Hannah. My engagements, being absorbing and numerous, kept me away from home much of the time.

“Five years after your mother died, my bachelor uncle, George Vinton Morton, who settled in Australia, passed away, leaving to me his great house and good-will in Sydney, Australia, upon condition that I would assume the name of George Morton and continue the business under the style of “Morton and Company,” a matter of sentiment, probably. As this could not possibly interfere with London interests, I consented, and in Sydney the continuity of the business affairs was not interrupted, as the new George Morton was very kindly welcomed.

“To Nathan was devised, unconditionally, some

sheep-grazing lands, and several bare mountains in the mining districts. The lands have since been sold, and converted into funds, which are in trust securities now, and from which Nathan has received an income largely in excess of his expenditures.

“ ‘Now, for the first time, I impart to you the sad episode in my life. Being susceptible, beauty attracted me. In the same boarding place with me was Marguerite Coke, a young English woman, who taught elocution in the Normal School. Marguerite’s beauty won my attention; the loneliness of her life, my sympathy; her bravery in endeavoring to gain a livelihood, my admiration; her nobleness of character and gentle, kindly nature, my love. I made her my wife. She knew naught of the name of Vivian. I was not honest, boys; I made a mistake, I should have told her then. Happiness for both was my aim—and Charles, we were so happy—so happy—but it was brief.

“ ‘I was called to London to arrange for an immense shipment which was to leave Australia in our own ship “The Sea Bird.” I believed that a long sea voyage would do Marguerite a vast amount of good, and so wrote to her, directing her to embark on our own ship, which was to call at “Rio” on the way, this being a long route. Alas! that was all. The ship with cargo was lost in the Pacific. A large fortune went to the bottom. I closed the remnant of the Sydney house by correspondence, and was too heart-sick to return there. I will not question my loyalty to my Uncle’s name or memory—I never wanted to hear it again, and so I resumed Vivian. There was so much of romance, in love and grief, in one short year, that it seemed like a dream. I cannot, when I reflect upon

it, realize that the events are real—and yet they must be. Coming to America, I brought Nathan, who was then harmless in his hallucinations, and placed him with Davy Burton, who met me when I landed and took charge of him, and to whom was confided the fact of our relationship, and from him none ever got the tidings—not even you boys. This, for pride, nothing else. If his lunacy was ever so harmless it would have been a source of mortification to you, so I decided to wait, and hoped for a return of reason before disclosing that he is related to me, and that George is his son, in fact, but mine by adoption. Davy held the trusts for Nathan. I am now his trustee, but provide in my will for the management of this trust estate.’”

Charles paused.

“Now,” said Mr. Vivian, “let me finish it. You know the rest—the years of study abroad and your return. May came into your hearts, and is now in mine, and in our home. The sea gave up its dead, and Marguerite Coke, the pretty girl of Sydney, who became the wife of George Morton, is this handsome and talented Margery Manning, seated by my side, restored to the place once occupied by her in the heart of George Vivian. The death of Mrs. Vivian, of which you were advised by cable and by letter, seems now to have been providential. After placing her remains in the Vivian tomb, I went from London to Australia, where as guardian for Nathan I sold for several hundred thousand pounds the mining property, always considered worthless, left by our Uncle and have brought with me certificates of securities which places him and you, George, beyond want. Margery, this is your home. ‘The Oaks’ will bid welcome to its new mistress.”

CHAPTER XLV

"FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE"

"Charles," said Mr. Vivian, who advanced to greet the boys. "I sent George to request you to come this morning for a sacred duty."

"Well, sir," replied Charles, "you know there is no duty that I would not perform for you."

"I have not yet recovered from the surprise of the last few days," said Mr. Vivian, "but I know that all is well, that the lost is found, that Margery is my wife, but, as I was at the time of my wooing, years ago, George Morton, and was sincere in my intention of remaining so, I was married a Morton, and gave Margery that name. To save all questions in the premises, we have concluded to permit you to re-sanctify the union. She shall be Mrs. Vivian."

"Well, shall I be 'Morton' or 'Vivian'?" inquired May, approaching in time to hear the last of Mr. Vivian's remark.

"I think I'll let George attend to that," said Mr. Vivian, smiling.

"If it is left to me," said George, "I'll make it 'Vivian' at the earliest possible moment. What do you say to that, Aunt Margery?"

"Your Aunt thinks that will be the proper thing," returned Margery, accepting the new title.

"You are happy, too, are you not?" asked Charles.

"Oh, unspeakably so," responded Margery, "but I

am yet dazed, and find myself wondering if I am going to wake from this delightful dream, to find May hopelessly seeking her father, who may never come, and myself awaiting the call for another act of 'The Scarlet Letter.' But tell me, George, do you remember leaving the play just as the last act was closing, on the night you were present?"

"Yes," replied George, "father complained of suffocation."

"I saw him," continued Margery, "and in the hush of that intense moment my gaze seemed fixed upon his receding form. His semblance to the dead was so great that it kept closing round about me until, how I spoke my lines, I felt myself going—going. I fell. They told me my acting was perfection. It was truly the real thing."

Ona Leland and Eleanor St. Clair were now announced and were most cordially received by Mr. Vivian and Margery.

"We've come," said Eleanor, "to see if you will not 'rub the lamp' again and get us into the family."

"It would meet with no objection on my part, I am sure," said Mr. Vivian, never forgetting his natural gallantry.

"I am glad to hear you say so, Mr. Vivian," said Ona. "You don't know how soon I may ask the privilege of swinging on one of the branches of this family tree."

"I'll gladly take down any sign of 'No Trespassing,'" said Mr. Vivian.

"May," said Eleanor, "we most heartily congratulate you on the successful end of your persistent quest."

"I cannot express my joy," said May, beamingly.

"And now," said Charles, "I want you to join us

in a purely personal and domestic matter. We are going to have a wedding."

"Whose?" said Eleanor.

"You'll see very shortly," said Charles, "and desiring disinterested witnesses, or those out of the family, I have chosen you."

"I love a wedding," replied Eleanor, "and will never outgrow the fascination the ceremony has for me. I often find myself following a concourse of girls into some strange church, attracted by a wedding-march, even though uninvited."

"You'll see a bride of more than sweet sixteen to-day," said Margery.

"Call the bridegroom, George," said Charles. "He's in the library talking with your father. Doesn't that seem strange? You escort Uncle Nathan. How odd? What a knot!"

"Yes, and what an unravelling!" said George, starting upon his mission.

Standing in the centre of the circle, Mr. Vivian, taking Margery's hand in his, repeated after Charles, "I take thee, Margery, to be my wedded wife, for better, for worse."

Tears of joy and gratitude rolled down Margery's cheeks, and Charles pronounced a benediction upon Mr. and Mrs. George Vivian.

CHAPTER XLVI

A DOUBLE WEDDING

"THOUGH I am lighter hearted, Sam," said May, interrupting a tuneful apostrophe to the awl and thread, in the cobbler's shop, one morning, "I am not any lighter on my feet, as you will see through this opening, pleading for your skill."

"I am glad, Miss May," said the ever-ready cobbler, "that your feet always bring you to me."

"I never forget old friends, Sam," said she, "and I promise to come to see you whether I have feet or not. As a little girl you were kind to me, and as I grew older you were a comforter by your wisdom. I have learned to love your philosophy, too."

"In what respect?"

"In that you are contented with your lot, Sam."

"Yes, that is so, truly, but when it comes to wisdom we all learn a lesson from you," replied Sam.

"What lesson? I am anxious to know."

"Never to destroy old letters," said he, earnestly. "We do not know at what time they'll make useful witnesses."

"Providential in my case, wasn't it?" replied May.

"Pennington's opinion helped some, didn't it?" asked Sam.

"Yes. I'm grateful to him. He caused the witness to testify."

"Which worked wonders," continued Sam. "Your

Aunt Cynthia is quite lonely, isn't she, since you and your mother went up to 'The Oaks' to live?"

"No, we see her each day; besides, that was the thing for us to do. I have the best father in the world. It was so long before I had any, you know, so I am making up for lost time in loving him very much."

"That's right," said Sam. Then, attracted by the sound of wheels, he looked out of the window. "Well, as I live, if there isn't Dick Leland in that old dog-cart, just as he used to be!"

Dropping his shoe, he ran to the door.

"Hello! Hello, Dick! Come here! I've something to show you," at the same time pointing to May. They were all glad to see each other.

"What have you to show me?" asked Dick. "May Manning, as pretty as ever?"

"No, Mister Dick, you're wrong," said Sam, enjoying his own humor. "May Vivian, at your service, sir."

"Of course, I forgot," said Dick. "The world has gone round, and been ringing the changes since I went away, hasn't it? I was just on my way to see you, May. Come, get in."

"Have you seen Helen?" asked she.

"You bet," said Dick. "She met me at the train."

"Have you seen Eleanor?"

"Right again. I don't mind telling you, May, that I am down here to arrange with Helen to adopt me before her long dead and ever-lamented Mr. White turns up by accident and forbids the banns. There are so many strange things bobbing up around here, that I have concluded to take no chances. So she is going to accept me, and my worldly goods."

"In exchange for hers?" quickly responded May.

"I admit," said he, "she has attractions other than personal."

Nathan occupied each day in superintending the construction of a palatial modern home upon the estate of Burton, which was appropriately to be known thereafter as "Burton-Thorne," having in view the pleasure of remaining days of his life with his son, George, and May, his niece—as a cousin-bride.

Upon the third anniversary of George's first visit to Vivian Hall Seminary, when he championed May's cause, St. Clement's Church was the scene of a double wedding, which made four people very happy. The Bishop of the Diocese married Ona and Charles, and Charles performed a like service for May and George. A new wedding march was composed for the occasion, and the sweet strains that filled the Church were evoked by the masterly touch of Nathan Thorne.

